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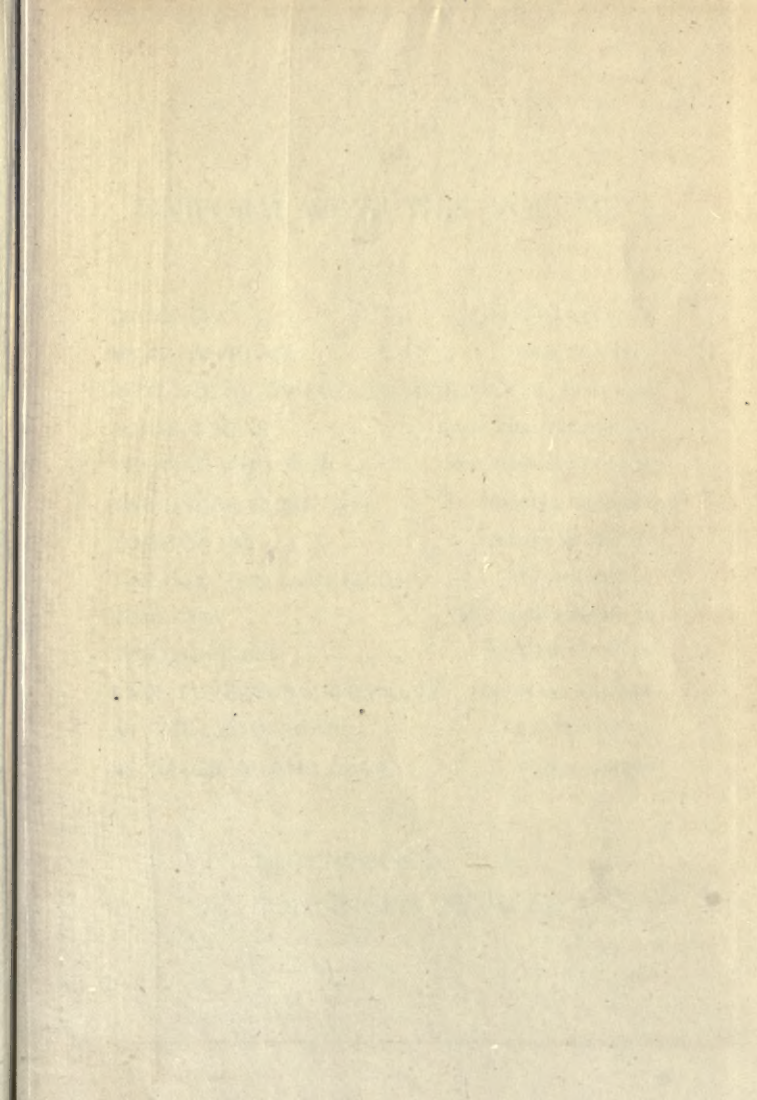
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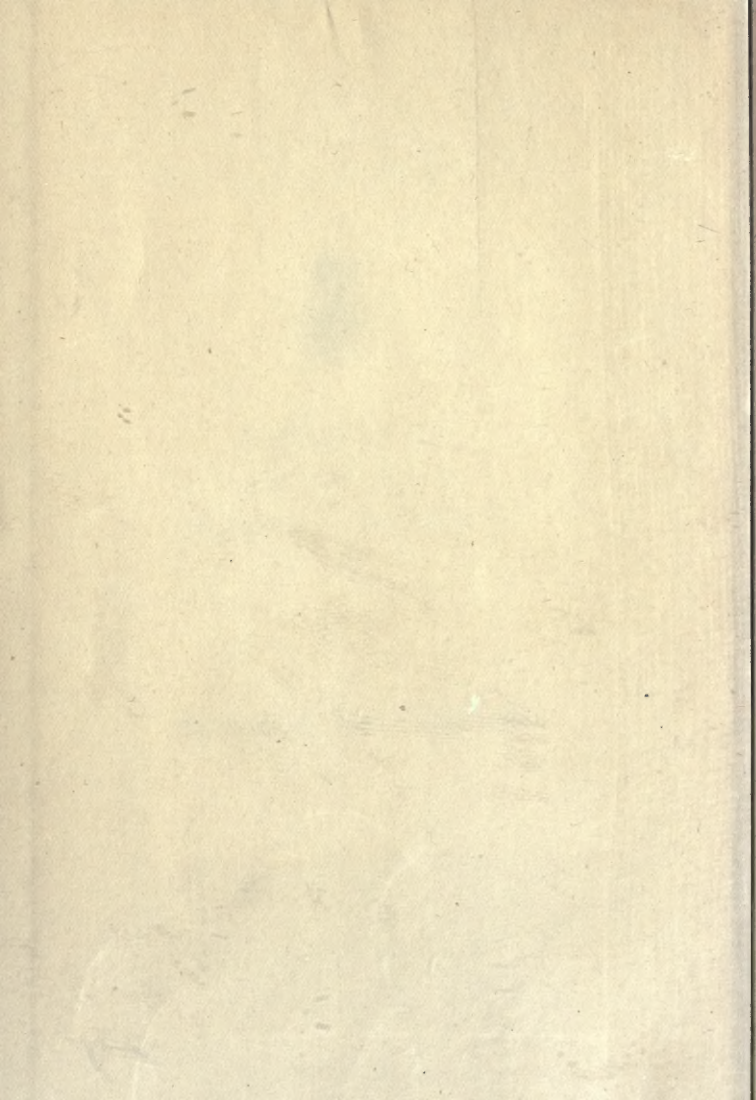




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## UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME.

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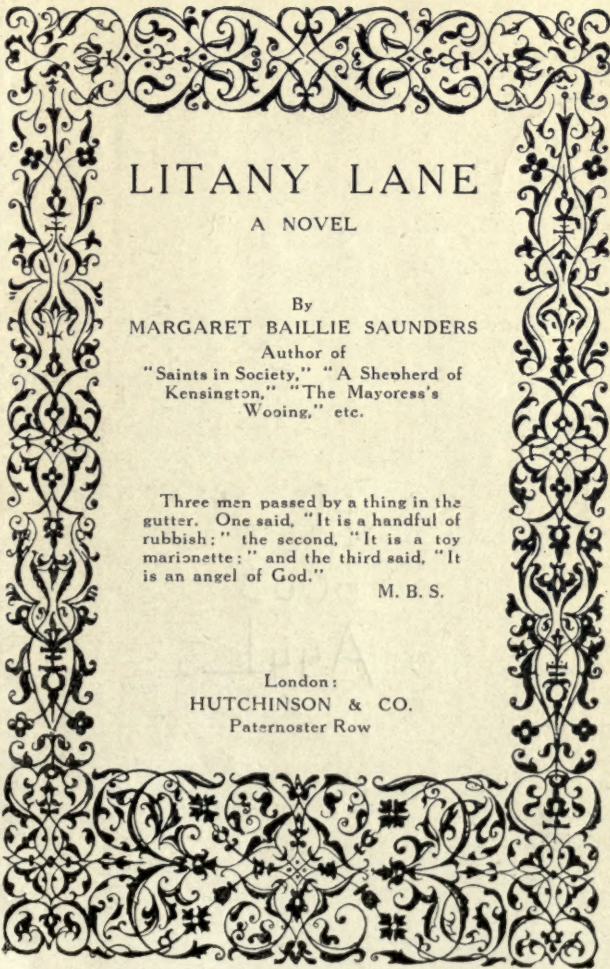
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MY LADY FRIVOL.. .. .	ROSA N. CAREY
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BY ORDER OF THE CZAR .. .. .	JOSEPH HATTON

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"She broke into movement to delicate music." p. 142.



# LITANY LANE

A NOVEL

By  
MARGARET BAILLIE SAUNDERS

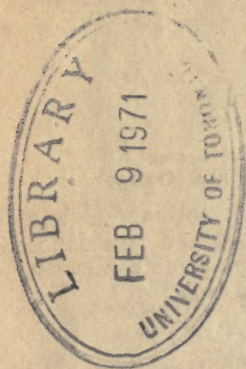
Author of  
"Saints in Society," "A Shepherd of  
Kensington," "The Mayoress's  
Wooing," etc.

Three men passed by a thing in the gutter. One said, "It is a handful of rubbish;" the second, "It is a toy marionette;" and the third said, "It is an angel of God."

M. B. S.

London:  
HUTCHINSON & CO.  
Paternoster Row





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# LITANY LANE

## BOOK I

### CHAPTER I

"For that which God doth touch and own  
Cannot for less be told."—GEORGE HERBERT.

Tossing herself in a whirl of thin clothing, a flying creature of points and gleams of foot and face danced in the middle of a dark room with passionate velocity.

A crowd of faces closed round in a ring.

"She flings like a terrier puppy!"

"She is foot mad!"

"Most women have the devil in either their heads or their heels. She has him in both."

"Just see that spinning movement. Did you ever know such a breather? She's been at it twenty minutes."

"Keep it up, Nell. The cat's round the corner and the Jews fighting for pennies in the backyard," said a girl with beautifully dressed fair hair, who leaned forward with her pointed elbows on her pointed knees and the Gothic face of a racing consumptive propped up on her thin hands. Her needle and thread and a shoe lay neglected on her lap.

The applause came in fevered whispers, like the gusts of night breezes. Round and round flew the wild figure, her arms folded on her breast, her incredible witch's feet tossing, turning, toeing, tipping, double-shuffling, hopping, crossing with the fantastic swiftness

of lightning. Her raised face, tinted the dull magnolia-white of the Londoner, with a slash of scarlet lip, and a line of upcurled impudence in the nose and chin, was peaked into a set intensity, the very solemnity of concentrated joy; the glorious, almost sacramental gaiety of the miserable momentarily mad.

All the unconquered insouciance of the unconquerable Cockney was gathered up in that small white face as in a cup of ivory. It was the intoxication of race-instinct let loose in a slave. It was a folk dance, therefore a folk-religion—the faith of those humorists who hie from Essex marshes east of London Wall, within sound of Bow Bells, laughing and starving in the same breath.

The dance was a soundless performance. Heavy as were her coarse and hideous boots, the dancer's inspired feet within them turned their sound on the bare boards to the quick patter of falling rain. The tap, tap of them and the sniggers and whispers of the ring mingled with the hum of machinery like the wind in a wood.

Suddenly a word whizzed round the circle—

“The Boss!”

Someone slid the door open and slipped into the room with a kind of flop, as a fish might have entered if thrown from behind it, a shabby little man, with big fish-like eyes, and loose concertina-shaped trousers widened at his flat feet like the fish's tail. He stood so a second, his back to the door, saying nothing and staring at the dancer, a passion of writhing fury on his smudged, thick-featured face.

Then he gave a sudden spasmodic utterance to one hideous word culled from the bottomless pit of the gutter, crept swiftly up to her—put his hand on her shoulder, and pushed her steadily and remorselessly to the door.

Arrived at the broken front doorsteps—the “sweating” shoe factory had once had pretensions to being a

private house—he gave her a brutal throw from the shoulder, with a touch of his boot-toe to add dramatic effect that almost sent her headlong down their mean steepness. With some smartness she caught on to the broken stucco gate-post at the bottom and so saved herself a fall on the head. Clinging so to the post she stood panting and heaving for a moment, breathless with her late exertions, and glaring up like a wild cat at her persecutor. Someone inside the hall tossed the man a shabby black hat and dirty thin coat that had once been heliotrope, and he flung them at the panting figure with another oath.

“Where’s my money?” she gasped between her hard breathing.

“Money? You dare to talk to me of money? Starve—go and starve!” he said. He called it “shtarve.” He also told her of a place to which she might easily dance herself. He even defined a route in broad terms.

She pinned on a brownish-black, flat hat with shaking hands. Her face was white to lividness and she was panting with rage, but her sharp, glancing, animal’s eyes looking up at the house caught the faces of some of her fellow-slaves pressed to the dirty window, watching.

The sight gave her sudden courage, touched her extraordinary sense of grim, detached humour.

Picking up her shoddy skirt in both hands she made the Jew a curtsy worthy of Madame Pompadour, and in a few light steps cut out into the middle of the narrow roadway, and broke forth into a series of whirling capers that carried her in a triumphant *pas-seul* down the street.

“All right, Lazarus Schutski, I’ll dance you that kick back one day!—remember!” she tossed back at him over her flying shoulder, and had the last word and certainly the last fling. The volley of incoherent oaths



sent after her might have been uttered to the breezes. She was herself the incarnation of a breeze.

But round the corner, out of sight of her tormentor, she slowed down, and shook off the four cynically delighted children and the one starving dog who had followed her performance, and looked coldly and grimly over towards what she called London.

"Like some bold seer in a trance  
Seeing all his own mischance  
With a glassy countenance."

• She was in it now, but this was East London, the dumping-ground of poverty, dust-cart refuse, shoe-makers, and saints. If you look from Piggie's Island over Bethnal Green towards Farringdon Street with a breaking, defiant heart it is astonishing what you can see. Over there, beyond the gasometers and chimney-shafts, beyond the seething slums, beyond the marshy flats and rubbish heaps, looming out of the fawnish mist shone the great golden glory of the world, the centre of all dreams' desire.

Sometimes on rare ruddy evenings from the scrubby flats of Hackney Marshes she caught a glimpse of St. Paul's dome out of the opal nebulous pile of the great city, and it was always pure gold, and stood for gold, and beckoned gold. But it was the gold of romance, the land of magic, and had nothing to do with money, in the sordid sense.

She could not see it now. Mist and slums hid it and choking, staring despair. For she had danced away her work and the winter was coming on and there would be no other work to be got. She couldn't wait, for there was Dad to keep, hard enough on the six shillings a week that she had lost him for a caper, but harder still on nothing at all. Even a skeleton, only half alive and shuffling on and off his rag bed day in and day out, had to be fed.



People with second-time operated cancers have appetites of sorts, and have to have rent paid for them. Hitherto she had managed it, heavily, unquestioningly, with a surly acquiescence that covered an instinctive notion of duty. But now ?

Now the spirit of adventure took her by the throat—the mad spirit of Dick Turpin which comes to life again and again on his old haunts of Cambridge Heath and London Fields.

She would seize and snatch and fight ; she would sell her dancing, her tricks—anything. The thought of the ragged invalid fired her with a kind of animal rage, the fury of a little snarling animal ready to spit and snap, hardly with any emotion so rounded and coherent as pity. Nevertheless the result was the same.

For she turned in the direction of London City, and stepped gallantly on her magic feet to whatsoever market she could find for the tags of talents and graces that shone out of her misery like jewels on a dust-heap.

## CHAPTER II

“ Heat of passion makes our souls to chap, and the devil creeps in at the crannies.”—THOMAS FULLER.

ON the very afternoon that the court, to a flutter of fans and sneers and feathers, gave a laconic verdict of “ decree absolute ” over that nameless tangle, the Finroy marriage, the losing party briskly set about another tangle. Gay London had had its wonted snigger, and the ribald show was over, and the world whistling for its motors, but that losing party still craved an audience before which to perform.

Lady Phillippa Finroy, legally victorious and utterly wretched, said nothing, but drove home westwards with hard eyes set in futurity, shaking and shuddering from

the depths of her furious heart to the violets in her corsage.

But Mr. Nigel Majorson Finroy, a gentleman loudly brave in words, fired gay with rage, and savagely theatrical in defeat, jumped into a cab and drove further into the City in defiant search of adventure.

"I'll marry the first girl I meet!" he swore roundly.

"Shut up!" said the lawyer, who was also a weary friend of old—and much-tried—standing, who had worn out his patience with watching three hours' tussle over a disgraceful business in an atmosphere of eighty in the shade.

"I've said it before, and I say it again."

"Well, go on saying it a bit longer, and it will do instead of the deed," yawned the friend.

"Pooh, Alders, you don't know your man, that's all I can say! Did you see Phillippa's face! Do you think I'll stand that?"

"I found it jolly hard to stand Phillippa's face," said Terry Alders, kicking the cab apron with a vicious boot-toe. He had refused to take up the case himself for practically that reason.

"And the way Maudie Bathshaw rounded on me at the last, the hooded snake! Of course it's easy enough to see her game. But if she supposes I'll marry her now I'll just show her I can find a dozen chorus-girls, yes, and gutter-girls, better than her, that's all."

"In the name of common decency, Finroy, do think of Lady Phillippa, and shut up! After all, it's over and there's no more to be said. You ought both of you to be satisfied. She's got rid of you, and you've gained a glorious reputation for gallantry that will make you famous for ever if you want. Don't be an idiot and over-paint the picture and turn it into caricature. She's had a rough time of it to-day for a refined woman. Dragged through enough mud to kill her if one knows anything of what good women feel—and I suppose

they do feel, even when they look as frozen-up and contemptuous as she did. You've won your point—you're free to go to Jericho if you want to. And she's ruined."

But your rogue in the wrong will bristle with heroics when the wing-feathers of angels would be shudderingly furled.

"Dash her, she worked up that 'proven cruelty' business herself! It was a plot she deliberately laid to trap as decent a fellow as ever lived. But hang it, a man must live a man's life! Am I your fellow for petty parochial morals?" he asked with heat. "Am I your Puritan?"

"Certainly not!" said the lawyer enthusiastically. He suffered constantly from being a little too human for his profession. He appeared quite consistently legal—he had the tight mouth, drooping eyelids, indifferent linen, and air of pitying superiority of his race. But behind this make-up he was passionately a musician and an unerring theatrical critic. He was always trying to repress these enthusiasms under a dusty boredom of manner, but failing sadly, and the result rendered him heavily cynical.

The artist in him was suffering now, hideously. The hot stuffy smell of the crowded court they had just left was in his nostrils—stale breath and patchouli and ink and lilies—and before his mental eye still flocked and jostled the eager satyr faces of the "smart" audience come there in crowds to glean all they could of a society scandal—Pan-faces, Silenus-faces, in a lovely riot of furs and millinery and fans and flowers. Cartoons of men, caricatures of women, muttering, whispering, chattering, mud-throwing, chuckling shamelessly over the garbage. A seething Comus masque of gods with the brains of gorillas. And in the midst of it all the beautiful picture of Lady Phillipa, exquisite, tortured, angry, broken-voiced, with those defiant

Parma violets at her heaving breast. It was a monstrous position, and even now it was not done with. She was one of the handsomest women in London, and now all possible capital would be made out of the fact. Her tragic face would be snapshotted for the daily illustrated papers—was already being “blocked” for the night’s press in many a rushing “processors’” den. Nobly born, sensitive, reticent, she would be martyred by the very things that puffed Finroy’s broad nostrils with pride, and would die daily of glories that swelled his vulgar soul with the joyous self-importance of what is called a man of the world.

He went blustering on. “Let myself be married to Maudie Bathshaw? I don’t intend to have the whole place laughing at me. She’s got me into this, but she shan’t have that satisfaction. The biggest hit at all the lot of them—Maudie and Phillippa and the Gov’nor and all our blessed Puritanical society—would be to pick up something out of the gutter and marry her in the regular fashion in a church, with a parson and bridesmaids and all the show. And I say hanged if I won’t do it!”

“You won’t get a church to do it.”

“Won’t I? I’ll get the family parson to make himself useful—old Maurice Majorson—Luther Romanus we used to call him at Wadham. Runs a church somewhere east of the City. Can’t refuse. My Gov’nor got him the living from the last Government—Crown thing it is—and that when his politics were all wrong for the job. I haven’t seen him for a year or two, but I fancy he’ll have got some of his Oxford notions rubbed off by this time. These Crown living fellows, run in by party, can’t afford to be sticklers as Churchmen—they’ve got to be useful and dance to any tune. Moral, run a family parson in appointment got from the Prime Minister’s footman.”



"Do you mean to say you've hidden such a treasure in East City?" said Alders in his slow drawl. A man with sleepy eyes and centre-parted grey hair can sham seriousness so well. "You ought to place a fellow with a talent for marrying divorcees in a good-class neighbourhood: a smart place, where there'd be a run on his line of business. Wouldn't he have done at Cobdenmere?"

The would-be bridegroom nodded. He rarely grasped a sarcasm at his own expense.

"I'll show him and all my brutes of relations what I dare do," he snorted. "They've thrown enough stones at me. I'll show them that a City Majorson has got fighting blood in him yet! We Finroys aren't allied to the old Majorsons of Dick Whittington's day for nothing. Hang it, when my blood's up I'll do anything. I swear it—a nameless thing shall bear one of the finest names in the world!"

Words, words! Alders let him talk on, knowing his blood traditions. Wasn't he the only son of Sir James Majorson Finroy, a famous City merchant, a Parliamentary and pamphleteer of a bygone Liberal Government, a man who had talked so hard about his political ideas and quoted Cobden so incessantly that he bored even Gladstone, who threw him a Baronetcy to keep him quiet. After which he had retired to his residence at Cobdenmere, in Kent, and grew cabbages on a philosophic principle, invented impossible systems of European peace, called every man his brother and wouldn't shake hands with a tradesman.

Up to the present Nigel seemed to have inherited only the theatrical inconsistencies of this worthy father without his solid courage. The son's social ideals were expressed by an entire throwing over of all self-restraint, any courtesy that cost him trouble, and all decency that seemed to him to serve no particular or immediate ends.

He was a blonde person, good-looking, if a little too broad and fair, with a cherubic effect of outline heavily contradicted by the hardness of his eyes, and a general air of vainglory and cool impudence that had always got him a good newspaper paragraph audience. He had done some speechifying and political writing in between his private gaieties, and had mapped out for himself a Parliamentary career when he should succeed to the title and quite limited little estate—one had almost said cabbage-garden—of the good and serious Sir James. On these grounds he imagined himself to be a graceful combination of Count D'Orsay and William Pitt, but the result was rather like a pocket Bacchus in business. This horribly public affair now threw all such hopes into abeyance. His wife, the daughter of the late Marquis of Rackstock, had avenged her wrongs at least so much.

Terry Alders let him talk on with the amiable latitude usually allowed to lunatics, directed his attention to the uses of refreshment, and listened to endless confidences about Maudie Bathshaw's pursuit of him, the vampire, and Lady Phillippa's spurning of him, the Puritan, with the patience of the sleepy and unbelieving. Finroy was always as peevish with the women about him as Benjamin Constant was with Madame de Staël and poor Charlotte. It was all their fault. They had done it. A nameless thing should bear one of the finest names in the world. Words, words!

Nevertheless the three grey Sisters must have their cavern underworld very near to the hour of those idle words, to cast a warp through their woof, and to weave them into deeds.

Almost, if one could have paused then in the race and clamour of the traffic, there might have been faintly heard the burring of Clotho's relentless wheel, a steady monotonous undersong, humming out a destiny. Where did it come from? The bell of St. Paul's was

tolling. The bored barrister was humming to himself the spinning-wheel *motif* of Saint-Saëns' "Omphale" symphony, "Ta-ah-ta-ta, ta-ah-ta-ta," unconscious of any mystic influences prompting him to do so. Were the three grey dames already seated, grimly invisible, at Ludgate Circus, with thread, scissors, and turning wheel making what a man's insensate caprice willed into a web of mighty circumstance?

For as the two men drove along in the home-direction Nigel suddenly leaned out of the cab, saying—

"There—over there—look at that girl."

"Well, what of her?" said the other man sleepily. "Down on the lowest rung, evidently, or she might have made a name in the world with that face—just the sort of face to get her on in comedy or mimicry. Queer what these streets and alleys will produce, eternally! Now there goes little Nelly Gwynne all over again if someone would give her a solid meal and teach her a song and dance or two! Rather amusing to do it oneself if one got the chance."

Nigel's eyes were fixed on the girl who stood talking on the kerbstone to an older woman, a middle-aged and blowsy creature of frankly evil significance. The last rays of the dying autumn evening caught and illuminated the younger of the curious pair, and brought into outline the cut point of an ivory-coloured face and chin raised against the sepia shadows of the tall buildings. A small face, flowering on the top of a flat slip of body, drearily clothed in faded heliotrope, like a Japanese anemone on its tinted stalk growing out of the mud. Turned in a little peak of defiance to the shapeless, bedaubed thing facing it, it suggested at once misery and impudence. Only a fold of dark chestnut hair and a hint of red in the lip gave colour—otherwise a little mousy-eyed *gamin* of a thing, like a dozen you might meet in a hundred yards' walk along Euston Road any day.

Then suddenly, through the passing crowd, a man in black pushed his way swiftly, his path bringing him also close up to the two women. The raised ivory face in the gleam of gold caught his involuntary attention as it had caught Nigel's, and he turned to glance at it with a kind of fierce scrutiny. The plain rim of his collar showed him to be of some order ecclesiastical, even if his shaven mouth and charming eyes, half searching, half sly, had not done so in themselves. It was a face of almost belligerent earnestness, made human, actually whimsical, by wrinkles round the eyes, the kind that come with merry suffering. He only glanced up once and hurried on his way unnoticed by anyone in the crowd, but when he did so his face had grown bleak and harsh with understanding.

"The unborn spirit trodden under man's heel," he said under his breath. "How long, Lord?"

Again the bell tolled.

"That's the bit of rubbish," said Nigel Finroy, "that I'll put in Phillipa's place."

The two women were talking together in the thud of traffic and the shuffle, shuffle of many feet. The tardy, drab-pink autumn evening died squalidly over the Masque of Death in the gutter mud.

"Fine clothes," the lady in dirty white and sham turquoises was saying.

No answer.

"No work."

Still silence.

"Smart hats."

A pause.

"Diamonds."

"I could make a cup of cocoa do," grated a thin young voice raucously.

"Easy enough," muttered the elder woman, shuffling a little on the pavement, her smudged eyes wandering



incessantly over the crowds eternally passing under the lamps whose hard white electricity warred with the smoky glow of a soiled sunset. The enamel on her face looked a silly violet in the half-lights. Her voice was thick and slow and her manner nerveless, almost soporific.

"Look at those others, there, all smarter than any thing you've been accustomed to. That's Clara Symons with the pink feather, and there goes Polish Olga in blue, and there's the French one with earrings—we don't know her name; she's new. We call her the Baby. All of them ladies! See how *they* get on! What's that you say? River? Only the court missionaries talk about the river. You need no more think about the river than a fine lady at Court in a train and feathers thinks about her own shroud. It'll come, but not yet."

The girl gave a short, sharp laugh, like a little bark, and looked critically at the tawdry pacing figures going to and fro, shuffle, shuffle, pace, pace, to the slow boom of the neighbouring bell. Most of them quite young girls, and every other one of any nationality but English. She herself stood out from amongst them by reason of her hungry-looking thinness.

"I suppose that's why you've let me share your room these two nights, and call you Laura, and take you for a friend?"

The woman grunted indifferently.

"I told you it was singing and dancing I wanted to do," the girl went on dully. "You know that. It wasn't any false pretences that I shared the bedroom on."

"Oh no, dear no."

"Just for the first few days I managed to pick up quite a nice bit that way and pay for a bit of lodging, but it won't keep me and Dad in food—specially as you can't sing in proper style when you're out-and-out

mad hungry. A voice is like a clock—it won't work with nothing inside."

The flat, grating tone of the speaking note confirmed her words horribly. She pulled the violet ribbon tighter round her slight throat as though to still the craving.

"You needn't sing," said the woman, in her muffled nasal tone.

"You don't dance as light as you ought when you're giddy in the head. I haven't tasted meat for a week, and that was bloater paste."

"No need to dance either."

"But one would have to be very hungry before——"

The woman laughed out harshly and mirthlessly, as a skull might—*le son de mort*.

"You fool!" she said. "I suppose you think someone will marry you! Think you'll be a lady, do you, and wear a ring and a wedding dress. The moon will fall first. The——"

At that instant a cab jerked up to the kerbstone, and a man leaped out and put his hand on the *gamin's* shoulder, saying—

"Madam, will you marry me?"

The second's amazed silence was broken by a laugh from the creature in white. Alders jumped out of the cab after Finroy and had him by the arm in a moment, saying—

"For Heaven's sake, don't be an idiot."

But the girl stood looking reflectively at her impetuous suitor. She seemed hardly aware of any incongruity in their respective appearances. Her own wretched fineries, her draggled attempts to be a milkmaid on a dirty kerb, a gay butterfly in the midst of its native city mud, had a certain touch of comedy—pathos, some of us might have said. But not Finroy. He thought it a fine joke. No agonies except his own ever touched him. That is why his relations called him a sensitive fellow.

It had been a wet autumn and the streets were slimy, and a cruelly illuminative beam of dying sunshine showed the splits in the street sylph's boots; but she kept her chin well up, and her eyes had a glassy sort of semi-gaiety kept together by blinks.

"It's a genuine offer," he said.

Again the laugh from the older woman, then she caught a hint of something official in the lawyer's eye, and slunk back into her native shadows, and was lost in the pacing crowd.

Still the girl did not answer. Her face was quite unreadable, but Terry Alders, turning to her, saw her scarlet upper lip lifted slightly, showing an instantaneous gleam of very white teeth.

It was a funny little trick, like the faint snarl of a terrier or a rat, and it passed in a flash, and the lips shut primly into a button. It seemed to tick off, in a queer, impish way, some inner decision of her own.

"Say yes—do," persisted Nigel, ogling as engagingly as he was sure he knew how.

"Was it Hanwell?" she said quietly. "Or private, in a doctor's family, with washing and all found except the strait waistcoat?"

It was now Alders who laughed.

"Come, that's enough, Nigel!" he said. "You've got your answer in all conscience."

But the other shook him off and pressed eagerly closer.

"I assure you, madam—miss," he went on. "I was never more serious in my life."

"That's a bad look-out," said the girl, in the same quiet, intent manner, her queer "cute" eyes never leaving his face. "What *are* you like when you're silly?"

"Come, you're hard on me!"

"One hard and one soft, that's match," she said. She spoke in a kind of easy, sing-song fashion, and the low,

dull grate in her voice gave a curious ominousness to all she said. Rather like a child speaking its gravely unsparing comments aloud, calmly experimental as to consequences.

Finroy turned on all the gay persuasiveness of which he was capable, making bold use of his hard blue eyes and the bridling of his irresistible head. She watched with gravity.

Once again Terry noticed that queer lift of the lip, and immediately following it, she curtly interrupted the blandishments to say—

“ You’re a regular gentleman ? ”

“ I—I—— ” he stuttered.

“ From the West End and that ? ”

“ Yes, yes—that sort of thing.”

“ With estates—and a lord and a ghost and a villain in the family, maybe ? ”

“ Some of them—yes, all three. Oh yes,” stammered Finroy, feeling Terry’s quizzing eye on the back of his neck.

“ Haven’t you forgotten the family fool ? ” that gentleman said insinuatingly.

“ That I didn’t need to ask about,” she retorted, without a smile. She turned to the other man. “ You mean it ? All correct ? Proud old mother, family portraits, faithful retainers, oak staircase, debts, no wits, and no character ? ”

“ All that sort of thing, yes,” he groaned imploringly. “ Here’s my card, if you doubt me. The lord in the family is a baronet, but I don’t suppose that really matters.”

“ No. Not if there’s a dinner in it too,” she said, glancing at the card with its names of two well-known clubs and a town and country address.

This broad hint solved the situation. They turned into a sort of underground restaurant, hardly more than a mere eating-house, and a meal was ordered for the lady.



Terry, sleepily watchful, and forced into the pose of mentor against his will, studied Nell Gwynne at close quarters, and laid a plan to get her out of Nigel's idiot wager when the novelty had worn off a little, and nearly went to sleep over it.

Nigel was frankly hilarious, and "laid down his coat" again and again for the East Ender to briskly tread upon.

But the guest ate like a little animal. She even tore up the dry roll with trembling fingers and finished that before the soup could be brought.

She watched every plate and dish as it was put on to the table with eager ravenousness. Her famished grey eyes that sometimes shone sharply brown gleamed like two stars, as she merely nodded with her mouth full to Finroy's chatter, and glanced about the gaudily lighted place noting every detail of its tawdry splendours.

By and by she emitted some brief information. Her name was Elinor Lovekyn, Nelly for short. She had been in a shoe factory, but had always longed to go on the stage. To cling to the lowest rung of a ladder whose highest climbers reached the unspeakable glory of getting put on post-cards seemed to her to be nothing short of immortality. But the principal difficulty of life was the commissariat business. A nuisance, but there it was: that and clothes. She had been turned out of her shoe factory for dancing in work hours. Usually dancing and singing might get a girl on. Otherwise—she shrugged her shoulders. One felt that Miss Lovekyn knew her London very much as the lesser and hunted animals knew their foraging pastures. Such a grimly frank little savage was after Finroy's own heart. He laughed and applauded continually.

But Terry's plan succeeded.

"Look here," he said in an insinuating aside as they

came away. "Give her enough money to last her for a day or two, and then go and get Parson Majorson to perform the marriage ceremony on the sly, eh? You said East City? Probably we're quite close to his parish now. You can announce it in the papers when you've fixed up the banns and that, you know."

Which was absolutely mendacious and misleading, but it gained a little time in which lay Terry's chance. Give Nigel time and he always forgot his most solemn intentions.

In that lay the hope of his friends, since his intentions were often of a suicidal folly.

But a few days later a paragraph appeared in several of the papers which snapped finally the last lingering friendship between the two men. Terry had one blazing scene with his old friend and left him storming at all Finroys and all City parsons with political appointments and slippery consciences.

For the insulted Lady Phillippa, hiding her angry self among her dogs and flowers in the house in Little Wilton Street, was forced to read of the forthcoming marriage which had been arranged—very much so in this case—and would shortly take place in a well-known City church between "Mr. Nigel Majorson Finroy, only son of Sir James Finroy, ex-M.P., of Cobdenmere, Kent, and Miss Nelly Lovekyn, of Piccadilly."

The last was an invention. The bride's real address was Cat and Mutton Alley, Bethnal Green, and would really have sounded more picturesque. But it created quite enough stir. The well-known City church was immediately sought for high and low by a hunting pack of reporters on fire with the dramatic possibilities of this clandestine wedding, and determined to get snapshots of the contracting parties at all hazards.

"Another chorus-girl marries an aristocrat" for a headline, or something of that sort, with sidelights on

how it is to be done by the rest of the female youth of England, a kind of recipe which had of late outgrown in popularity the homelier one of how to make a dressing-table out of an empty packing-case and a piece of Nottingham lace, at one time so beloved by the lesser feminine journals. A title or a toilet-table, from very much the same ingredients, i.e. a bit of lace veiling and something wooden and very empty indeed.

### CHAPTER III

"My soul, there is a country  
Afar beyond the stars,  
Where stands a wingèd sentry  
All skilful in the wars."

HENRY VAUGHAN.

A GREY flagged courtyard, black velvety shadows and chalky high-lights on the moulded stone of a pseudo-classic church; a silver wheel of pigeons flecking the gloom of smoke-shadowed walls, and, in a shaft of gold sunshine a scarlet-clad altar-boy swinging a brazen censer to and fro to fan the charcoal into red embers. A round-headed rascal, serious enough for the moment in his occupation, pursed up of lip over the endeavour to make the heavy vessel swing rhythmically to the slow beats of a bell ringing for ten o'clock festal Eucharist—the autumn meridian shown in the yellowing leaves of a smoky plane tree told the day to be St. Luke's. Very busy also trying to run in a familiar Gregorian melody to the same concatenation of sound and movement, and crooning the syllables in jerks to fit the pull of the chain.

"Bridal glory round thee shed;  
Meet for him whose love espoused thee  
To thy Lord shalt thou be led.  
All thy streets and all thy bulwarks  
Of pure gold are fashioned."

When that card-playing, servant-ridden liege lady of England, Anne, of moribund memory, built or rebuilt several London churches after the Fire, one fourteenth century monastery chapel behind some merchants' houses by the City wall east of St. Paul's came to no further harm than that of being covered with a coat of classicism on the outside and a little whitewash interiorly. A lick of political Protestantism, in short, calculated to bring it into line with the state-arranged theological views of the last reigning Stuart.

The lick, however, was only on the surface, and its origin remained recorded in its title—St. Simon-Cordwayners, Litany Lane—which carried it back by one sweep of association to the days of the City's most sumptuous romance. Here the Guild of the Cordwainers—spelt “cordwayners”—one of the lesser but still important of the great Craft Guilds, had held its anniversaries, celebrated its red Masses, had started for its chanting street processions, and flaunted the emblazoned cloth coats and gemmed insignia of its civic import.

To-day two men walked together in the courtyard, under the shadow of the overhanging warehouses. The sharp rap of their voices cut into the still place, over the boy's crooning, with a brisk echo.

“You won't marry me?”

“I'd rather bury you.”

“Then I can tell you there'll be the Jingo to pay.”

“One of your own strange gods? Well, well, he shall have my *devoirs*—under the circumstances.”

“Look here, I believe the law can compel——”

“The law? The law has unmarried you. Let the law marry you again!”

“D—n you, Majorson—you to talk like that when you've got my Gov'nor to thank for putting you into this living! Beastly to round on your own people like that.”

“I'm obeying the law of the Church, that's all.



Nothing to do with political influence, or one's own people either, actually. A higher thing. There are higher things."

"Man-made nonsense, like any other law!"

"Then, lor, man, why do you come here for its blessing?"

The priest turned, half stopped, and looked with rallying impatience into Finroy's eyes. He was an almost singularly handsome man of thirty-six or forty, of medium height, and curiously neat and decisive in build and movements, with a finely wrought olive face brought into prominence by the sombreness of his dress—he wore his cassock and biretta and carried a surplice over his arm, having been on his way to take a service when Nigel had driven up and accosted him. He did not know, even now, that the motor cab standing outside the high iron railings contained something intent and critical, kicking a small buckled shoe and watching him curiously from under low brows. He would have been furious if he had.

It was a queer place for so much modernity to invade in so sudden a fashion. Such modernity that came to it could only want something, with that kind of ecclesiastical cupboard love so trying to the downright parson.

"If you doubt me go to the Bishop," Majorson added, making a stand by the vestry steps and looking at his watch.

"The Bishop! A fine thing if a few fanatical priests can dictate a man's matrimonial affairs in this fashion!"

"It's their province, after all, isn't it? The marriage blessing can't be given twice, you see."

"Blessing! Ugh! No wonder your wretched creeds are going to the dogs!"

"From celestial realms descending  
Bridal glory round thee shed"

crooned the red boy from his sunny corner.

"Men make creeds of their own passions as arbitrary as any pronouncement of Nicæa," said the parson, shrugging. "Just take the negative out of any of the commandments and there's the world's own Decalogue for you! You must recognize it? 'Thou *shalt* commit, thou *shalt* covet,' etc."

He made a quick deprecating gesture, and smiled sideways with a wry kind of contempt at his companion.

His left eyebrow was set slightly nearer over his eye than the right, and the twist gave something quaintly sinister to his otherwise almost too faultlessly cut face. It humanized the carved ecclesiasticism into a possibility of passion and whimsicality, like a portrait of a saint gone delightfully wrong at the last moment.

"Ah, I think I see—the shocked relation hiding behind the—clerical official," sneered Finroy. He would not say "priest." He had a feminine fashion in warfare and never forgot the opportunities for pin-work.

Majorson whistled.

"Call it what you like," he said shortly. "You have such fine names for your own vices that your labels for my—principles—are immaterial."

There was an odd lambent light that used to come into Nigel's eyes when he was outwitted, capable of creating an almost physical sense of hatred, like the spit of a frog. Majorson felt it now, and his own flung back a steely counter-challenge.

Nigel wavered under the dark regard and fell to blustering in his pettish, finicking fashion, cracking at the flagstones with his heel. The parson tried to add an appeal to his better nature, which he thought he made gentle. On the contrary, it cut Finroy like a lash. He could not be gentle with that fury of repulsion shuddering in his very finger-tips. Contempt clipped his terminations, and rapped in his consonants. The clash of their two furies was almost audible in the silence.

"So good day to you," said Nigel, tossing an unclean

blasphemy about the Church and the Church's laws in his kinsman's teeth. His tones were lightly gallant, and he turned away, bowing mockingly like a Frenchman.

The bell stopped ringing. The pigeons wheeled once and alighted on the cupola. The scarlet boy went in at the sacristy door with his swinging embers glowing alight. Majorson paused on the steps to raise his biretta with a gesture equally mocking and gallant to watch the strong well-built figure stride away across the yard with regret cutting into his wrath. Then for the first time he caught sight of the girl's face in the cab. It looked back at him eagerly. The eagerness was of a purely business character, Miss Lovekyn being concerned solely about her own matrimonial prospects. But something in her unconscious face—something hardly so much of the child as of the little puzzled animal—gripped the priest-instinct in him and turned his contemptuous anger into broken pain and dismay.

That half-fed, half-grown, coquette the partner in the wretched business? He had imagined something so utterly different, something much bolder, more cunning, more sophisticated. It was the puzzle in it that tore at him as monstrous, frightful. The ivory peak of the face seemed familiar, the rather tilted small nose, the intentness of the curious, hard eyes, the line of the full red lips. Where had he seen it before? But he came into daily contact with so many of the young people, men and girls, of the submerged classes, that probably all he recognized in the case was a type, he said to himself.

Even as he stood there trying to locate the sense of sharp pain and recollection that the face called up, a loud laugh rang out from the pair in the cab, and tossed and re-echoed in the walled courtyard as tangibly as though someone had sent a cricket-ball ricochetting sharply between the church and the warehouses. The insult was obvious. The clock struck ten, and he had

no choice but to go in to the scented gloom of the church and perform the sacred duties awaiting him with such serenity as he could muster.

His face was grimly alight as he brought up the rear of the festal procession. He did not attempt to deny the furious human indignation that lay behind the ecclesiastical verdict. He was fairly exulting over the priestly power that gave him the right to refuse marriage to a thing like Nigel Finroy. Let him take the civil form like any other sneak. He had fairly swung out his refusal, as Torquemada might have swung out an Inquisition fiat, as Savonarola refused to absolve the dying "Magnificent," Lorenzo Medici, while the agonies of a wracked city raged for remission round his gorgeous death-bed.

His warfare was against the sheer daring of vice, tricking itself out in the methods and ceremonies of the socially decent, impudent, blatant, unashamed. To such a man there was a swinging raciness in such a fight; a raciness which made the keeping of his thoughts in any sort of discipline a hard struggle.

After service several cases of poverty and shiftlessness came before his usual tribunal, and his afternoon was, oddly enough, filled up by a committee dealing with rescue work that met further east. Here he had the pleasure of hearing a very long-footed maiden lady of fierce aspect, in a hat like an aeroplane, stand up and deny the existence of such anomalies as sinners through hunger and poverty. Evil was evil, pronounced this lady. Stupidity was also stupidity, he echoed, grimly, in his own mind.

The small anxious face in the cab called up all sorts of questions. He wished he had not seen it. It struck a fearful note of pathos. One tries not to be sentimental, but these things drag at the heart-strings, somehow.

When the meeting was over he hurried back to Litany Lane, and went into a small shop, with leaded



windows, close to the church. A little grey man rose as he opened the door, mouse-coloured both of hair and face, and wearing a dark grey cassock of rough material, with a woollen cord round the waist.

"My dear Jalfin," said the Vicar. "I come to you to revive me! I have just heard a lecture on the sheer officialdom of sanctity, the routine of all inspiration, and the impossibility of all possibility in the feminine temperament by Miss Frubbert. Help me!"

"That woman," said the small grey man, sitting down again to his work of carefully oiling an oak frame with a bit of rag dipped in linseed oil, "makes common-sense a caricature, and goodness into a savage lunacy. She shivers up all holy dreams, and turns passionate impulse into horrible systems. You must belong to a section, and have a card announcing it to hang by a red cord on your bedroom wall, before you can be said to have acquired a heavenly longing. She calls herself a Protestant, and falls down and worships missionary boxes! Lord, deliver us from such! For they are many!"

The Vicar laughed and looked round.

"Well, got all the things ready for the Princess?"

"All, Vicar. This job is the last," said the little man, who spoke very sharply and quickly. He had sprouting bushes of brows half hiding his shaded hawkish eyes. "The frame is Gothic, but Brother Stephen bears the taint of Italy in every dash of his paint-brush—as you see. The creeping in of modern Romanism—Italianism."

Majorson looked absent-mindedly at the picture, a very lovely Saint Agnes, with slim feet and hands.

"Admirable," he said, and glanced round at several other objects from bronze shrine lamps to copper cups, and a very fine specimen of enamels on the three points of a cross of dark silver. "You've worked jolly hard," he added with enthusiasm.

The little man grunted. It did not become the lay Sacristan of the Cordwayners to be affable, or the Brother-in-charge of the image shop to praise his own wares. For all these artistic treasures were the work of the Industrial Guild bearing that name, and this small, narrow shop-room, which adjoined some of the church buildings at the back, was the place in which the work was sold for the benefit of the London street mission work.

"A private exhibition like hers will be a good advertisement for this sort of thing," said Majorson. "That was one of the reasons I agreed to let the Princess Max have a show of them. She says they will sell."

"She says!" repeated Barney Jalfin, bending over his bit of rag and oil-pot. "A heap of fashionable women, scented up to the eyes, wriggling in their silks, dangling their silly chains! They to know whether St. Agnes carries the correct kind of lamb, or wears the proper coronal! They'll all be thinking of their own hats."

"Not Her Royal Highness?" said Majorson indulgently. "Come, now."

"She will be thinking of yours, sir—that is, how to get you a mitre!"

Majorson shrugged, a little contemptuously, half amused. Everybody let the waspish little Jalfin talk as he liked. His splendid work always outbalanced his words, and his cranks were cheerfully forgiven.

"Talking of women of fashion," the little brother said suddenly, laying down his implements and standing up, wiping his hands on a cloth. "We've had one here to-day—a colossal specimen. I ought to have told you before, Vicar. I'm sorry I overlooked my duty, but you were out at a meeting early in the afternoon, and she came at noon. She also went quickly. She came about a marriage."

"A marriage?"

"She wanted to stop it, I understood. Had a pro-

prietary interest in it, I gathered, from her glaring eyes. She caught me in the sacristy, seeing after the vestments. Very impudent and persistent, like all her sex and set."

"Well, but what about the marriage she wished to stop? What do you mean?"

"Said there was some brute of a man—your pardon, Vicar—who had been divorced and was going to get married again here at St. Simon's! A likely tale I told her. 'Madam,' I said, 'we don't re-import returned empties here.' She seemed quite relieved, though she looked at me as if I was a fly in gum."

Majorson knitted his brows. This was a new aspect of the situation. He asked the lady's name. Brother Jalfin did not know it. He asked what she was like.

"Twenty warships set sail, with as many more silken flags waving," he replied poetically, then suddenly descended to earth. "Painted to the ears but done cleverly," he said. "Eyelashes shaded, eyes managed, hair enhanced the colour of varnished pinewood, tall, well built—rather too well built—gorgeously furred and laced and scented and silked, and a Tartar if there ever was one, as there has always been one ever since the dogs left the palms of the prototype's hands in the palace yard of Samaria!"

"You are sure she left no name?" said Majorson, taking no notice of all this. "It wasn't Lady Phillippa—anything?"

"She gave none. I wouldn't give her time. I bundled her and all her works, including her complexion, out of my sacristy, and made the sign of the cross to clear the air after she had gone. I had to do that or——"

"Well, she seems to have been very obedient."

"Oh, it wasn't that, but I mentioned a person in holy orders that I thought might be capable of defying his Bishop and tying up the precious bridegroom for a consideration, and off she went pelting after him—Canon Slimson of Christ Church, Holiwell Square."

"Come, poor old Slimson! Too bad! Too bad! I don't believe he'd do it, when you really got him into the corner."

"Has any human being ever got him into a corner? Eels can't be got into corners. However, I got rid of the Scarlet Woman, which was all I wanted," purred the small brother, quite delighted at his success.

But Majorson was annoyed and puzzled. Finroy's affairs seemed to be even more complicated than the run of such episodes. What, in the name of Heaven, would be the outcome of such a reckless tangle of blind passions? And who was this other element in the hateful game? He gave up trying to guess, but the hopeless confusion of sin settled on to his mind as a conscious sadness.

The rest of his evening was filled up with Men's Club work and a late service for the Cordwayner Brothers, who met at nights, laymen and clerics, in an upper room in one of the church buildings, to produce the work of their various hand-crafts and to discuss their plans and arrangements. These were wood-carvers, church artists, metal-workers, window designers, architects, carpenters and missionists; amateurs, mostly, City clerks, working men, and giggling boys from Oxford with the heroic parochialism of the newly ordained hot within them. They earned their title only in the sense that they made cords to draw upwards the wandering heart of the world. A middle-aged stockbroker's clerk, with broken health and heart, who had learnt a curious system of making altar-carpets on a basis of coarse string came nearest to deserving the title in actual fact, for he also made clerical girdles in a kind of woollen rope. Otherwise the allegory—and the good-humoured clubmanship—sufficed.

A jugged gable looking over the courtyard formed a small chapel in which the brothers held their short night-office. For a short time after it, under the red-



tawny rays of the sanctuary lamp, they came and knelt there, and were still in meditation before the large wooden Calvary that filled the east wall. To-night Majorson drove his mind back through his day, removed thus from the maddening sense of Time, which ruins all true thought. The distant cries and sounds of a city, that most human of appeals, rang faint and muffled around their little island of silence. Here it was easy to pray for the fight of the spirit over the passions, that daily clash of seraphim and hell-legions that makes the anguish and splendour of the world. As a soldier on the side of the fierce cherubim of moral right he had to-day had a sharp engagement, and the dust and din of battle still filled his nostrils and quickened his pulses with its irresistible glory.

If a woman had fallen under the chariot wheels of such a fight wasn't it part of the battle? But the horror was that she had looked up at him from under them with puzzled eyes.

#### CHAPTER IV

"We are so slow to change our blameful life,  
We are so pressed to match alluring vice;  
Such greedy hearts on every side be rife,  
So few that guide **their** will by counsel wise."

RICHARD HILL.

MEANWHILE Miss Lovekyn, unaware of the trouble she was causing anybody, was being driven about and fêted to an extent that was beyond all dreaming. When they left the church they drove direct to a sort of office, a shabby place with a brass plate outside the door, and ugly blue papers fixed on to small boards with drawing-pins outside its lintel.

Here she waited again in the cab, whilst Mr. Finroy went in for a few minutes. He came out laughing and tossing up a coin.

"Shall we do it, Nell, or not? Heads or tails?" he said.

"Do what?"

"Get married. There." He got back into the cab.

"Can't do it to-day, anyhow. But come and show all the idiots in London that we can have lunch together, anyhow."

They drove to a place which perhaps no human being has ever entered before with such eyes of wonder. It was only the Carlton Restaurant, but to the East Ender, paled and almost shivering with awe, it was Paradise. She stood stock still at the entrance from the lobby staring helplessly at the forest of flowered and feathered hats—they were worn very large that year—at the inimitable shimmer of the dresses, the movement of the faces, the dazzle of the carefully posed beauty of lovely, idle women. She put up her hand involuntarily to her own hat—a new one bought in Oxford Street—and stroked down her thin grey coat mechanically. She felt that before such a vision she was indecently attired, even in these fine clothes—to her. Nigel laughed patronizingly, and had almost to pull her through the maze of little tables to a seat at the corner of the gallery, a thing he only succeeded in doing because the incessant chatter, like a surging ocean, mingled with the band and gave one a faint sense of courage.

Some of the women glanced up, sniggered, and turned away. Others gazed blankly through Nigel and his queer companion as though they were invisible. Men pointed them out with shrugs and the good-humoured sneers of fellow-sinners.

Happily for herself, Nelly did not realize anything of it all. She was only grateful to the waiter for not asking her to go out again, and sat studying the crowd with the profound intensity of a little dog. To her they were all such perfectly beautiful persons that any giggles or stares in her direction were accepted almost as compliments.

"Waiter, waiter! Have you any rice pudding?" Nigel called across several tables just as the band stopped after a gay air.

"Rice pudding, sir?"

"Yes. For this young lady. She comes straight from a convent and can only eat rice pudding and drink milk!"

He glanced round the room for the applause at his arch witticism. He got some in the eyelids of the men and the slow stares of the women, who admired the daring of blatant fastness.

"Your story!" said Nelly, slowly opening her eyes. "There now! Why, I eat anything I can get."

"Waiter, waiter, anything you can get! The young lady eats that, she says. It was a fasting convent."

"Fasting? You're going a bit too fast yourself, if you please. You're making all the pretty ladies stare and the ugly ones turn their backs on us. How horrid!"

"Surely that's the right way on, eh? Do I want the ugly ones?"

"Why do men—gentlemen—look with long looks and laugh like a dog snarling? Is it my hat?"

"Nonsense. Have some *hors-d'œuvre*."

"Old dove? No thank you. Pigeon isn't the kind of game to take high. Now what are you laughing at? I know, because Bob Higgle who sells rabbit-skins down Broadway told me so."

"You are lovely! Have some *pâté de foie gras*."

"What funny things you do eat. Paddy in a fog! Or was it frog you said?"

"Here now, have some *réchauffé de épinard*?"

"Chauffeur in a Panhard! What a name for dinner. It's like a cannibal. I do wish you would call beef beef and mutton mutton. What a nice band." She tapped with her feet. "If I dared I'd go and dance in that space by the lovely lady in a green dress."

"That lovely lady in a green dress would scream if you did. She is a duchess."

"Is she?" said Nelly, suddenly subdued, and leaning her arms on the table the better to stare with wide, reverential eyes at the graciously slim figure in green with a bunch of lilies at the breast. "How beautiful and happy."

"She isn't either," said Nigel, going on with his lunch industriously. "She's only well dressed and bored to death."

"Why? Bored? What for?" said Nelly.

"Her husband neglects her."

"Why?"

"You must ask Maudie Bathshaw," said Nigel, with his mouth full. "Thank the gods for me that it is so."

"But why does it concern you?"

"Ask Maudie Bathshaw," said Nigel again.

"Maudie—Bath—shaw," said Nelly to herself, making the little snarl-face that always ticked off her mental notes. She had quite a number of new names to learn, the names of all that funny food too. She had also to watch the duchess, who was young and dainty, with her lips parted and her eyes critical and intent taking in all the accumulated splendours, also all the mannerisms to the very shadow of a gesture. Nothing escaped her. She was going to do all that herself, every bit, when she got away, even to the way the lady had of holding up and caressing her breast lilies as she talked with languid sweetness to her companion, a very brilliant-looking little woman.

Already, during lunch, she had studied so many smart and sweeping exits that when their turn came to rise and leave the place, she got up and did a walk out that was a brilliant bit of caricature, and went quaintly with her scanty, ready-made coat and skirt, and tossed back imitation fur stole. She was the queerest little figure. Several heads turned to look at her, and one or two



people laughed with contemptuous good nature at the obvious pathos of such an interloper in such company.

Nigel laughed too, highly pleased. He had another engagement that afternoon, but they were to meet again at a theatre later on, and he gave her some loose money out of his pocket as he put her in a cab and said good-bye for the nonce.

When they had parted and the cab jolted through the crowded Haymarket towards Leicester Square she opened her hand and counted over the coins, separating more than half from the rest, and tying them up carefully in the corner of her pocket-handkerchief. Then she got out of the cab and went into a Leicester Square shop and bought a cheap imitation lace blouse, and a black cotton voile skirt, and some soft green satin ribbon for her hair exactly the colour of the Duchess's dress. She searched along the kerb in vain for lilies, however. It was not the time of year for them. Then she remembered that duchesses were glorious beings, independent of flower seasons. But she sighed happily, because she had been even thus near to divinity. That was something to dream of for ever.

But Mr. Majorson was fated to find out the meaning of Brother Barney Jalin's Scarlet Woman in rather an unexpected way.

The next day a letter on pale lavender stationery, addressed in a leaning Italian hand, arrived at Litany Lane. It ran :—

“DEAR SIR,

“I am requested by Her Royal Highness the Princess Max of Lesseny to ask you to call upon her at four o'clock this afternoon.

“Believe me to be, etc.,

“AUGUSTA MALINS.”

Majorson went rather gladly. This lady was a great friend to his work, and the ride towards the West on a 'bus top this golden autumn afternoon was cheering after the shifting grey and clatter of the City.

If there was just a hint of a pose in calling on such a personage on a 'bus it was one of those poses that the more saintly a High Churchman is the less can he resist it. And after all the 'bus went almost as close to the house as any other vehicle, for the Princess Max lived in an echoing street in the northern regions behind the Marble Arch, a street with high iron railings before the windows, and deeply set, low front doors with the heads of rams in stucco staring rather idiotically from above them. The shades of Lady Blessington and Mrs. Brian Newcome haunted the long dim terraces of these houses, and one might have seen the billowings of ghostly crinolines in the wide sleepy drawing-rooms at night, and have heard the tinkle-tinkle of a wraithly Tom Moore singing flowery love-songs at fluted-silked pianos.

He found the royal lady seated with Miss Augusta Malins in her inner drawing-room, a temple whose dim-toned, uncertain shadowiness were fairly familiar to him, he having been a privileged visitor upon recurring occasions. The low lamps and lumpy old-gold footstools, the statuettes, the solidly banked flowers, the portraits of dogs and babies would have been interesting objects to anybody but that most desperately unseeing of beings a religious man. The framed fire-screens of drab and magenta roses in Berlin woolwork escaped altogether an eye that would have noted a Hans Memling immediately, not for its artistic but its theological significance. But the mystic inner meaning of drab wool roses—quite as potent, by the by—was utterly lost upon the clerical mind.

The Princess was, of course, of far too high rank to

need to be fashionable, and much too young to be called out of date.

She greeted him sitting, and waved him to a chair and was quite unusually quick over the business details of a big sale and exhibition she was organizing on the Church's behalf. She enquired rather perfunctorily about the Cordwayners' exhibits, and then said with sudden animation—

"Is it true that dear Sir James Finroy is so ill?"

"Only too true, madam."

"Sad, sad! It is thought he will not live?"

"I fear so."

"It is this awful affair of his son's that has done it? What a career! What a scandal!"

He bowed.

"Naturally persons of principle do not discuss these things," said the Princess. "No. It is our duty to stamp them out by saying nothing" (she called it ("nodding")) "about them."

Again he bowed from his shadows. There fell a silence. The irritated enquiry in the Princess's eyes became almost vocal.

"It is but the odder day"—she hurried on with distinct asperity—"that even remarried widows were considered in bad taste. You recollect? When we wore buttoned boots with toe-caps and bits of black velvet round our necks with crosses on them. But divorce!"

"Lady Phillippa will continue to wear a cross about her neck," he said.

"So? Well she probably will. The world—of good women—will see to it that she does, do you mean?"

"Your Royal Highness has pronounced," he replied, "that even remarried widows are hardly out of the wood—I mean the fire. Where, then, is the divorcee?" he added, with a wrinkly, grim little smile all his own. The light from one of the lamps heavily shaded in dull yellow shades dwelt with a faintly mellow distinction

on his dark face, and made him look like a Don Guzman as idealized by one of Holy Philip's Court artists, minus the forked beard and the cut-throat cynicism.

"Still, I alluded to Finroy himself."

"But was not the verdict 'decree absolute'?"

"Certainly."

"Then she is quit of him?"

"Madam, good women—and God—are never quite quit of sinners."

The Princess fluttered her eyelids and shook a pensive head. It was the sleepy languor of heavy lids over agate-coloured eyes that gave individuality to the plainness of her too round, sallow face, and rather curved thick little nose. Such eyes and her long, slim figure gave her her principal distinction.

She wore only black, very rich and drooping in effect, and had long yellow hands which even a great quantity of fat rings could not vulgarize, their ivory thinness being inherited from generations of women of prayer who had raised just such waxen palms to altars, in nunnery and in palace, for many a war-wracked generation.

There was also a nun-like acquiescence in her bearing, prim for her thirty-three years, and possibly a trifle posed.

Her early widowhood—she had lost the boyish semi-English princeling her husband twelve years ago—perhaps accounted for it in part; her Belgian birth, only slightly crossed by German blood, and not sufficiently so to spoil her millinery and temper, more so. The fact that she had wished to remarry and had been forbidden to do so in a Court whose royal arbitrator disapproved of second marriages had added a touch of subdued and nameless coquetry to this demure bearing. She seemed to be tacitly on the defensive in a delicate way of her own. Everybody smiled rather indulgently if you mentioned the Princess Max. She stood, in the



English public mind, for the traditional coquettish royal widow, and as such provided perfectly legitimate drama, even romance, for the masses who read about her in halfpenny paper paragraphs and gathered in some roundabout sort of way that she was human.

"Is it true that Mr. Finroy is going to marry again?" she said.

He paused. "It was announced," he said.

"Oh, I know, of course. But that is not the last story by any means. They say that dreadful woman, Mrs. Bathshaw, is posting spies at all the City churches to prevent it. She wishes to marry him herself. Can such a thing be true?"

He shrugged involuntarily.

"Madam, can anyone understand the designs and hopes of such a woman? They are a hideous mystery."

"Ah, yes," sighed the lady, pursing up her lips. "Happily a sealed book to all of us. But still she is of good birth, though horrid. If anything happened to dear Sir James—forgive me, he is your kinsman, I know. But the succession makes even Mr. Finroy a catch—from such a woman's point of view, of course. And she was one of the principal witnesses in that dreadful affair, was she not?"

"She was," he said sternly. He thought of Brother Jalfin's visitor. "But apparently he has chosen another lady."

"A what, sir?"

"Your Royal Highness's pardon. Of course such persons do not exist conversationally."

She bowed gravely.

"So. But as it is to take place in a church and be performed by a clergyman the most awful person will exist after all," she said consolingly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You cannot do that," he said. "I, and every other man I know, would refuse to do it."

She shot a keen look at him and nodded. She had got some of the information she wanted.

"Ah, naturally you yourself feel strict about it. But Canon Slimson told me it can be done, with discretion, though he would not like to do it himself. I myself know of a case in which some divorced people were married in a church, and by a bishop too—only it was very early in the morning and in a fog, so I suppose it hardly counted."

"Nevertheless, madam, it could not be done in London, however early in the morning—even before the cock crow thrice."

"You mean they will have to have it a civil marriage at the Registrar's?"

"Certainly. With plenty of kodaks and halfpenny illustrated paper reporters they might make nearly as much splash as a Church wedding. Only society obstinately will not count it as the same thing—that is the great stumbling-block."

"Dreadful, most dreadful," said the Princess. She leaned back in her chair and said a few words in rapid French in an undertone to the silent lady with receding hair who was working at some *broderie anglaise* on a small sofa in the wide, dim room. She seemed to be giving her an order of some sort.

"All of them, dear Augusta," she was saying. "The evening ones and the illustrated ones too, and all the extra editions. Do not please overlook anything."

The man had turned away sharply, and stood pretending to examine a small alabaster statuette of a woman in a crinoline leaning pensively on a pedestal under a bell-glass. It was a portrait of a famous dethroned queen, presented by herself. He was trying not to listen. He was also trying not to be angry at

the humiliating discovery that he had only been sent for to talk scandal. Would he ever escape from the mud of the Finroy divorce? And what was this new complication of the other woman, Mrs. Bathshaw, a notorious society vampire, adding to the wretched hobble? The face of the girl in the cab and the slow puzzle in it came before him again. He suddenly hoped, hard and anxiously, that he had made it quite clear to Nigel that he could be married at the Registrar's. Had he been too angry to define this sufficiently? It should have been put very plainly for mere justice's sake.

The Princess interrupted his self-questionings.

"Ah, Mr. Majorson, the world and its wicked ways are quite outside my own province," she said pensively. "I do not enter into gay society. I am a mere on-looker, an audience; I am silent. My life is spent, as that of a widow should be, in good works."

She waved her hand to where on a dim old-gold sofa lay a heap of fluffy things, which, had one had the indiscretion to examine, would have revealed themselves to be crocheted under-garments. Much pink ribbon was run into these "good works." They were destined to be sold in the name of the very charity he had come about, and she had made most of them herself.

Nevertheless his glance, resting on these woolly sanctities, contained a gleam of ironical despair at the way people will persistently misinterpret the word "charity" when it suits them. He began to make his adieux. She took his hand and looked up into his handsome, rather offended face, a slight flush on her own, a little appeal in her eyes. She was unhappily aware that she had managed to raise the lurking priest in an otherwise good-humoured and witty friend. He had closed his lips tightly, and his chin had gone up ever such a little, and his eyes cooled. She could not gather what he

thought of her. This attitude, to a spiritual coquette, was particularly annoying, even maddening.

Now actually what he did think of her as he climbed on to an eastward-going 'bus at Oxford Street and paid his fare out of a handful of threepenny-bits was—

“ Professional good women usually spoil all their own influence by wool-work or scandal. To listen to them long, one would imagine that the angels wore flannel comforters and talked to servants ! ”

## CHAPTER V

“ Es ist so schwer, den falschen Weg zu meiden. ”—GOETHE.

FIVE diamond-combed ladies talked and shook heads together at the foot of the stairs. The Hinde's pins in neat rows upon their foreheads wagged like the swing of Justice's scales. The blues and oranges of their costumes, their clean aprons and bead necklaces, together with a perfect chorus of factory whistles making the echoes ring again, proclaimed the high festival of Saturday morning to have arrived in all its splendour.

But these ladies were utterly superior to factory whistles. They were the wives of costers, men with their own plant and barrows, and even donkeys, and therefore the social leaders of Cat and Mutton Alley. And as such they were standing at the open door in judgment on a gay personage who had just gone up the stairs.

“ Stockin's with lattice-work in 'em ! ” one whispered with stern, distended eyes.

“ Gloves,” said another ; and then again, in a concentrated snarl, “ *Gloves.* ”

“ Ermine fur.”

“ Skirt and coat to match ! ” put in another, breathless at this strange crime.



"A velvet hat—*with no fevver*," concluded another, hereby expressing a departure from all known social symbols and codes so violent that it struck the hearers momentarily dumb. It was as clear an assumption of change of class and tradition as the case, say, of a nun suddenly wearing a court train. No "fevver"!

Then the tongues broke loose, and the conclave spoke its mind in plain terms, terms that could be heard all over the alley.

But upstairs in a top room Nelly stood, excited and defiant, clumsily unbuttoning her glove and laying a little packet of paper round something that chinked as she set it down on the bare table.

"It's great things that you'll hear of me, I promise you that," she said, a quiver in her sturdy voice. "Things we none of us ever dreamed of. Nothing that ever happened to the others."

No answer from the dreary heaped-up bed in the corner.

"I've been back again and again and put the money here. This is better than the factory. And it means lots more money later on, money that you shall have."

No reply. The gaunt figure on the bed, with rags of bedclothes pushed up against its skull's face, did not move.

"It's honest, anyhow," she added, in a lower voice and a little sulkily.

"That's yet to be seen," the skeleton replied, in a brooding, hollow voice that sounded as though it came from a great and lonely distance. "You've been gone from home here of nights nearly a month now—twenty-five days and a half it is—and every other day or so you've crept back and left me packets of money, sometimes under the door late at night. But you've never come in. I haven't had the face to speak of you to Margaret Higgle yet."

"Does Maggie come in and see to you?"

"Yes, very good and kind she is, considering her a married wife with little ones of her own."

"Well, you can tell her I shall soon be the same myself. Tell her that!"

The shapeless creature on the bed gave a heave of the rags and pushed himself up into a semi-sitting posture and looked long at his daughter, groaning with the effort it cost him, but determined. His worn, hollow eyes travelled from her defiant, hard little face to the details of her dress. For certainly these had altered. The faded heliotrope coat was no more, having been replaced by a grey coat and skirt, certainly ready-made, with the skimmed and scanty skirt-edge and vast allowance of material in the back of the unvarying slop pattern, but still new and fresh and, to his poor eyes, smart. The rusty black hat was gone, and a gay thing of violet velvet topped Nelly's thick-growing, straight chestnut hair, which was tied over her ears in two coquettish ribbon knots, copied from a chorus-girl on a post-card. An imitation ermine stole, thrown with saucy emphasis over one shoulder, cheap new shoes, and a pair of beaver-coloured kid gloves, made her seem a dazzling vision to the poor creature under the torn blanket, half covered by an even more torn remnant of what had once been a tapestry curtain. The gloves seemed to him to decide the matter. He looked at them fearfully, long and very sorrowfully, and shook his head slowly to and fro.

"It was the last thing," he whispered, half under his breath. "The last thing the poor can hold on to. You held on to it at a few shillings a week, though that breaks many of 'em down. You did that, with all your folly and dancing. Now it's gone. Well, I'm going, and I'm glad to go. I'm leaving this world with the last pride I had in it gone."

He sank back exhausted, hardly conscious probably

of the cruelty of his words. Nelly stood by pulling off and crumpling her tell-tale gloves in one hand and looking down at him. She wanted to tell him that she was going to be married, but it was difficult to do so until the hitch in that connection was removed. It was nearly three weeks since the clergyman had sent Mr. Finroy and herself away angrily from his church gate. Of course it would all come right. They were going to some law office, a something that grand gentlemen know all about—in fact, they had called at one directly after leaving the church—and all would yet be fine and splendid and even Dad convinced, and the neighbours made to look small.

Just then the door opened, and the lady to whom the message was to be given entered with a sort of bang, and stood still, affecting intense surprise. This was Maggie Higgle, an old factory friend of Nelly's, now married to a wealthy coster, whose money was securely funded in rabbit skins. This lady now put down the blue and white striped bowl and rolled-up bundle of white linen that she carried, folded her firm arms, and looked at Nelly, up and down, round and side, from hat to shoe, and finally fastened her attention on the gloves. Never had the undying spirit of British matronhood on hot guard of the social laws shone more fiercely than it shone from the eyes of this priestess of Mrs. Grundy.

She was very handsome and very serious. Tall and solidly built, though quite young, fair with the opaque fairness of the London blonde, her fine looks were set off by a sky-blue woollen blouse, a golden-brown skirt, a silver tinsel belt, and an orange bandana by way of a fichu, folded with a Puritan neatness over her Hebe shape; yet withal she created a curious effect of extreme tidiness of outline. Her coiffure was a triumph, even in that neighbourhood. The ash-blonde hair was oiled and smoothed with almost incredible smoothness to her

comely head, and was ornamented securely with four imitation diamond combs, but the front hair was all rolled up into metal pins, which hung in a neat row round her brow from ear to ear, in a frank and beautiful hope of some future Bank Holiday fringe, too sacred to be commonly revealed.

Curiously enough, the style was not altogether unbecoming; it even suggested some of the portraits of the Comtesse de Gramont, or any one of the beautiful Lely ladies with their scanty row of forehead corkscrews. The long gold earrings added to this effect, and the string of pearls round the cream column of the neck finished the picture. Maggie was scrubbed, soaped, twisted in order. Not a detail was at fault. Her gala costume was as certain, as rigorous, as customary as that of a lady attending the King's Court, and quite as picturesque as any national folk-dress, from a Spaniard's to a Normandy peasant's.

"What are you looking at?" said Nelly.

"Ah, that's what I want to know!" tossed the lady.

"What?"

"Mind your own business."

"I'm minding yours for you for nothing," rapped young Mrs. Grundy. "Here's your father's sheets, that I've made for him with my own hands."

"Stuff bought with money *I* left for him under the door," said Nelly.

"Got how?"

"Got right and proper, through a lawyer."

"Indeed. Anything to do with a clergyman as well?" tossed Mrs. Higgle, glancing witheringly at Nelly's unadorned left hand.

"Half a dozen," said poor Nelly with bitter truth, and began haughtily to pull on her gloves again.

"Yes," said Mrs. Higgle slowly, gazing at their beaver neatnesses. "That's why they wear them. Kid gloves!—to kid the British public with. *I* don't



need to wear 'em. *I* have a lawful, married wedding ring for all the world to see."

A Frenchwoman may be dramatic, but a Cockney woman is melodramatic. Mrs. Higglar might have been on a stage with a shouting pit and a crowded gallery for the air with which she proclaimed herself the legal consort of Mr. Higglar, and the throw of her fine arm as she displayed the plain band of gold on her left third finger would have done justice to a Siddons. Nelly had never had any doubts as to the lawfulness of her friend's wedlock, having herself attended the ceremony at a Bethnal Green Church one snowy Bank Holiday morning, fairly pied with faded confetti scattered on all and sundry by the assembled company, and half drowned by wet snowballs rammed down her neck. But she was nevertheless deeply impressed. Not so much by the *morale* as by the manner of the lady, however.

She pinched her own third finger, left hand, under her glove, and looked at the dragon meditatively.

The moment for a retort was passed. Maggie turned to the bed with an air of consecrated matronhood, and began to feed and rearrange the sick man, preparatory to putting on the clean sheets that he had pined for so long in his misery, and had only got now at such a cost.

Nelly was hardly angry with her friend. The young woman only expressed what all the maids and wives of their social set would have expressed, only she was more polite than the majority. Some of the more violent moralists would have done it in cabbages.

The girl stood tapping her restless foot on the bare floor as she watched the domestic pantomime. Mrs. Higglar even patted the newly cased pillow with an air of moral reproof. "All very well for her, but *she* never could dance a step, so as to get turned out for it," said Nelly to herself, adding aloud, "Lots of good people are really only pigheads with a bit of side on!"

With the expression of this really profound ethical truth, Nelly stalked out of the room and down the narrow stair.

But the group of ladies at the bottom had still to be reckoned with.

They parted into a double line as she appeared and she found herself obliged to walk between them as in a higher caste an officer's bride walks between the men of the regiment in a church aisle, under their raised swords. No less did these coster dames hold swords over Nelly's violet—and un—"fevvered"—hat.

Their dignity, as judges, prevented them from using violence. They contented themselves with oracular remarks of the nature of *le double entente*.

"When will it be?"

"When orange blossoms grow on apple trees."

"The year after next?" asked one.

"Yes, when Whit-Monday falls on a Saturday," replied another.

"The ring's up the spout and the church bells up the steeple," said a third.

"I've bought the rice but it's turning green," cried another.

Nelly got past them as quickly as she could with her chin in the air. But a matron at the mouth of the alley, of less importance than the costers' ladies, being a mere artisan's wife, with less dignity to keep up, was buying coals off a barrow at the moment. She wore a man's cap, and a ragged dress and cape, and carried a baby, a bag of vegetables, a pair of boy's knickerbockers, a beer-jug, and two herrings in one hand and arm, and held up her apron for the coal-vendor to fill with a bucketful of coals with the other. Nevertheless, she found both time and gymnastic ability to send a piece of greyish-coloured slaty coal flying after Nelly, hitting her on the "latticed" ankle. The protest was even costly, as the coals were bought for a penny

a bucket, and the very recklessness and abandon of it took the audience by storm, and the shout of their ironical cheers and two or three more shots of coal pursued Nelly till she reached the thoroughfare and climbed on to a City-going 'bus and left them all behind her.

She said she didn't care ; it wasn't her fault ; but she sobbed resentfully, rubbing her ankle as the vehicle bore her through the interminable streets of barrows and flaming shops into the outer regions of warehouses, then of great mercantile offices, till she reached the significant and mighty buildings of the City itself.

"It was the dancing that did it," she said tearfully. "Can I help my feet?"

But by to-day's token she knew that she had cut herself clearly adrift and was on the high seas of something strange. St. Paul's, caught and glorified in the pale gold morning mist, showed in sudden vistas down high narrow alleys and ancient lanes, here a glimpse of dome, there of grey west tower half hidden by high buildings, then reappearing by some quaint crank of street or turning. At sight of it her courage rose. Hadn't it always beckoned her without her knowing why? She thought because it stood for big London, wealthy London. Anyhow, it had claimed her now, for she was actually installed in a small dark hotel in one of the narrow streets or alleys that branched off from Cannon Street, and was within immediate sound of its booming bell and its thundering presence.

It was here that Nigel had put her after their first meeting. It was from here that they were to be married. To-day she noticed a smart motor standing outside the front door, and wondered if it were Nigel's. She went proudly up the mean steps, and in at the narrow door and passage. She might be disowned by her own East End folk, but here she was a lady, or something uncommonly near it. There was quite a

wriggle in her walk as she entered the stuffy place, and her curiously light feet stepped up the stairs with an insouciance and gallantry unchecked by the solid odour of stale meals and ancient smoke that hung about the musty staircases, and in the hideous imitation tapestry curtains and pea-soup coloured stair-carpets.

Her rooms were on the second floor, and she had nearly reached them when she became conscious of someone standing at the sitting-room doorway and looking down at her. It was a presence that assailed you in little sounds of jerked silk, in a faint tinkle of bracelets, in an overpowering scent of some peculiar pungency, and, if you were sensitive, in an aroma of subtle but hot antagonism.

An overwhelming vision of beauty and fashion leaned forward and stared down the narrow stairway at the girl ascending.

"Oh—ha—ha—oh dear!" chuckled a thin voice affectedly. "Are you Miss Lovekyn?"

The minute Nelly answered, the speaker leaned back against the door-jamb as if for support, and fell into a fit of long and silent laughter, her shoulders shaking under her exquisite furs, her whole frame convulsed. But her eyes gave her away, for they contained in themselves no trace of the merriment that shook the lady out of her manners, but were all the time fixed in a blaze of scrutiny on Nelly's face. They travelled from that down to her figure, over the cheap fine details of her dress, to the very set of her common buckled shoes. The absurdity of the whole seemed to quite take away the lady's breath, but she took care to study it point by point.

Nelly stood suddenly rigid and on guard. She had not been in factory workshops for nothing, and recognized and ticked off low manners when she met them, with unerring precision.



"I say that's my name," she replied. "Why? Do you want to see me?"

"I did—yes, certainly, I confess I did want to see you," tittered the visitor. "Now I have—it is quite enough! Oh, dear! How curious!" Again the chokes of silent laughter.

Nelly walked boldly up the few intervening stairs and stood erect in front of the caller. The lady suddenly ceased laughing, as suddenly as though her intense amusement had been turned off by an inward button, her face hardened to ferocity, and the concentrated insolence of her stare might almost have cut like a knife. She threw back her beautiful chin, still leaning negligently against the door-post, and blocking Nelly's entrance into her own sitting-room. Her lips curled into the line of a half-moon, her eyes spat hatred. There was a silence.

"If you want to see me, that's my room behind you," said Nelly. "Please go in and let me pass."

No reply. Only the contemptuous stare. Nelly's heart was beating. She saw with her instinctively swift outer vision the very cut and trail of the woman's rich dress of dull greyish satin, the rope of pearls at her neck gleaming from under her sable outer coat, her heavily feathered blue hat, the dark red colouring of her hair, the massaged faultlessness of her complexion. She had never seen anything so beautiful. She did not see that it was in bad taste and a morning array that gave away the wearer like an advertisement. For a few seconds she actually staggered under the splendour of this being from the great world, and was without a retort through a complicated passion of rage and admiration.

Then the lady spoke to her, in slow withering accents—

"And so you think I would go into your room, or any other low place belonging to a thing like you!" she

said. "I should have to wipe the mud off my shoes. How dare you ask me—you!"

"Well, you've come yourself—I didn't ask you," said Nelly, bewildered.

"I came to look at the—gutter-snipe—that Nigel was using in his side of this ridiculous game," she drawled, with a whole universe of contempt in her tones. "Having seen," she shrugged heavily, a little too heavily, "I am satisfied. I am not afraid!" Again the short bark of the forced laugh.

Nelly stood watching her, breathless with the waves of incoherent fury that surged over her dismayed heart and consciousness. Who was this cruel, abominable goddess in her wonderful dress who stood at the portal and kept her out of her own room to insult her? Lady Phillippa? She had heard of Lady Phillippa; Nigel had made several rather incomprehensible jokes about her to his bride-elect. Evidently it was she, as she mentioned Nigel by name. Now Nelly had stood the lecturing of Maggie Higgle and the reproaches of her father with passable endurance. They were her own people. She had broken their strict social and moral laws and they had a certain right to judge her. She recognized the fairness of that even when they pelted her with coal. But here was a person whose whole traditions were different, who, according to all the settled beliefs of the poor, should have been the beautiful of feminine chivalry, should have taken no advantage of superior clothing or knowledge or power. Unconsciously Nelly became the judge.

Her visitor naturally did not know that that particular lift of that red upper lip meant anything special, though its faint snarl might have suggested a warning.

But suddenly Nelly half fell, half flopped against the banister behind her in an attitude of supreme indifference, tossing up her chin, and curving her mouth into a caricature of supreme contempt.

"And so you think I want to put up a thing like you?" she drawled, with a genius of mimicry catching the exact thinness of timbre in the voice that the lady apparently believed to be babified. "You? I only wanted to see the sort of—society-snipe—that Nigel regards as a lady in this ridiculous game. Having seen I am satisfied. I am not afraid!"

The shrug which accompanied the thin, tinny titter of this last remark was so violent that it nearly took Nelly off her feet, and she pretended to stagger for her balance, and then to regain it in a series of tiny wonderful twists and capers, all the time holding her head thrown back, her lips curled, and one hand affectedly supporting the imitation ermine stole exactly as the lady's hand rested with raised little finger on her priceless sable.

The imitation was extraordinary. Now it requires a fearful courage to stand by and see oneself imitated to the life by a person dancing, and dancing marvellously at that. It was more than the interloper could stand. Just for a second she stood rigid with rage, her little nervous ringed hands clenching with an actual desire to seize and pull down and tear the pirouetting creature before her. All the savagery of a soulless woman's hate shuddered in her eyes and teeth. She drew in a breath almost like a canine growl, then gathered her furs about her with a sweeping gesture of the arm which was panting to strike Nelly, and swept downstairs, calling up breathless ejaculations about pauper lunatics, and floggings at cart-tails, and other choice names and things not quite seemly to repeat in detail.

Nelly went to her room window and watched her drive away in the splendid motor that she had noticed on coming in. So far she had routed the enemy. But what harm would not such a woman do? Well, well, we who live by our wits must trust to our wits.

The girl had not time to take off her gaudy hat

before Finroy arrived unexpectedly. He sagged into the room looking played out and weary, white with a pinkishness about his eyes not becoming to his blonde good looks, and sank into a fearful and wonderful horsehair armchair with little or no greeting of Miss Lovekyn. He had already been living too hard and was suffering from the results. The last few weeks had been very wearing to the nerves.

"I've had Lady Phillippa here," said Nelly, turning her flushed face from the mantelpiece glass at which she was rearranging her hair after the dance.

"Lady Phillippa?" Nigel sat up suddenly and stared at her, trying to collect his confused faculties to face this fact. "Nonsense! The skies would fall first. Phillippa? Here?"

"They nearly did," Nelly answered. "She was so cheeky to me that I danced her out of the place, and she almost screamed with rage."

"Cheeky to you?"

"Sneered at me and all that. Called me a gutter-snipe that you were using to play a ridiculous game. Laughed at me, and stood in the doorway—so."

Nelly fell into the attitude again with great effect.

"What was she like?" said Nigel, sitting up.

"Fine. Oh, very. Pearls, furs, satins, scent, rings, side—lots of it. Red hair—carrots, we should have called it down our way, but here they say it's the fashion. Squeaky voice, like this——"

She began to do the voice, but Nigel jumped up from his horsehair seat and ran his hands into his pockets and whistled long and loudly.

"Maudie!" he cried. "By the seven imps! Maudie Bathshaw. Come here, by Jove, to stop this game! Eh? She said she'd do it."

He whipped out his watch. "Look here, Nell, can you fling your togs together and come across the briny ocean? Handful of things will do. By the by, that's



all you've got. Never mind, when you're Lady Finroy you'll—I say, we shall just do it. Won't she be mad? Hooray! We've got to call at an office on our way, take lunch, and run down to Folkestone for the night boat. Plenty of time for that. The thing is to get away from here before she's had time to be up to any more of her tricks. For she'll do something, you may be sure."

In a few moments Nelly, dressed for a journey, was being rushed in a taxi to Victoria Station. On the way they called at one or two places on business, raced through a lunch, and took an early afternoon train to Folkestone.

## CHAPTER VI

"May the best and brightest crown upon his head . . . be the devotion of those women he found slaves—and left queens."

BISHOP WINNINGTON-INGRAM.

THE house of Mrs. Alec Cates in Cambridge Square, Hyde Park, flapped to the autumn wind with rather weak decorations of flags hung on strings, flags which the languid half-fog was hourly deadening into wet, fawn rags. One or two policemen, looking three times more indifferent than usual, but wearing white gloves, were stationed facing one another across the roadway towards the direction from which a royal visitor was expected.

A small band of curiosity-mongers clung round the awning-covered and baize-laid pathway from the front-door steps, and servant-men with freshly powdered heads glanced forth from the windows occasionally, trying not to look conscious or proud, as they surveyed the common foot-crowd from over the window-boxes filled with smoky, mottled shrubs, standing under

draped window-blinds well filled with the grime of many winters in every graceful loop.

For Mrs. Cates had lent her town mansion for an exhibition of collections and sale of work, art and charitable in the main (also quite otherwise in the shape of certain articles specially designed for "presents," the time having come for a looming notion of Christmas to haunt the feminine mind).

The Princess Max had contributed a large quantity of woolly evidences of piety made by her own hands, and was most good-naturedly coming herself to see that someone came to buy them. It was for this cause that Mr. Majorson had, presumably, been summoned to her house some weeks ago, and the same pink things that he had hardly dared to examine now fluffed and foamed on the principal tables or stalls in Mrs. Cates's largest drawing-room. In the side and upper rooms several beautiful private collections of miniatures, fans, lace, etc., were on show, all belonging to fashionable women, also some wonderful specimens of enamel work, wood-carving, and jewellery made by amateur societies, many of these for sale.

Amongst these the Cordwayners' exhibits were being shown and sold in charge of Brother Jalfin and Brother Wallbank. The Princess was always very generous to them.

Just now Mrs. Alec Cates, a lady of wealth and some social ambition, with a brother-in-law an Under-Secretary, and an abiding but nervous desire to look like a Vicereine herself, was trotting about very flushed of face and harrying her servants in little gasps at the last minute. She was dressed in very pale grey, with a hat with real lace tags hanging on to it, mingled with floating pink feathers, and was madly waving a very beautiful old French hand-painted fan that only a shell-tinted Maid of Honour from the Court of Louis the Fourteenth ought to have dared to carry. Her

round face, tightened up in a stiff frame of fringe-nets, was almost tearful with excitement, and she had long ceased to finish any of her sentences.

The persons who had been invited to buy and the persons who had something to do with the exhibits now flocked in in crowds. It was easy to tell them from one another, the one half being smart and the other artistic. The smart ones looked through amazed and impudent lorgnettes at the artistic ones, but the latter posed with yearning expressions, unutterably contented, and cried to each other across the room in outlandish names. They soon divided into camps.

"You cannot make a person in a real beaver hat on flopped hair, with a badly fitting back but ideals, tremble. She is the one being in the world who never does!" remarked one brisk and beautifully taut little woman to another.

"I always shy when I see a scarf from Asia Minor round an eager neck," the other answered indifferently. "Yearning after the beautiful and unattainable makes you so dirty and conceited. And why when you get a soul for Art do you get a long back with it, and lose all your hair-pins? It does seem such a pity!"

"Unah!" cried one of the artistic camp in a terracotta coat and skirt to another of her order. "I want you to see this too delightfully absurd Ghirlandajo."

"Coming, Semiramis, deah!" cried the other, and a being in dead-leaf browns and yellow beads got through the crush by a vigorous working of pointed elbows.

"I want Scholasticah to see it too," said the terracotta Semiramis. "And Gwynneth, and Gythah, and Carabellah."

All these ladies came flying to the spot, which happened to be one of the Cordwayner's exhibits.

"Fetch Coreah and Ipecacuanah, and Gorgonzolah,

do," murmured Brother Jalfin inaudibly, and peeping fiercely over a small heap of hand-bound leather books. "Don't miss any chance of calling yourself after a cheese, or a disease, or a black-draught!"

But the ladies did not hear, being busy studying the picture, a copy, by Brother Wallbank, who was standing by quietly blinking.

"Chaste, but un-free," said one, her head on one side.

"I cannot *feel* it," said another in striped fur and orange glass beads, looking wanly into space.

"Curiously non-compelling," said another earnestly.

"The curse of the obvious. It *means* something. Art should not mean anything. It should be wild, untrammelled, tossing."

This seemed to be the case with the lady's own hat, which, being large and decorated by a tuft from some drab spotty bird, was apparently fastened by only one hat-pin to a coiffure fastened by only one hair-pin; for it had a habit of travelling as she spoke right to the back of her head and nearly resting on her neck. When it got to this point she gave a violent jerk with her head, bringing it back by a species of over-arm bowling on to the top again. This she did repeatedly, never touching it with her hands at all. It was quite a skilful trick, and rather fascinating to watch.

"Wild Natchah, above all things!" she said. "We all search for wild Natchah!"

"If their clothes walk about on them at this rate," muttered Brother Jalfin to Stephen Wallbank, "we shall get it."

But just then there was a stir in the room, and the bevy of artistic dames darted back to their own exhibits, desperately anxious to be ready for the Princess. The last glimpse Brother Jalfin got of Ipecacuanah was that of an excited and chinless profile, with a hat and spotted feathers half-way down its back, clinging



rapturously to a pedestal, in the very centre of the inner ring of the neat and shoe-horned, and "made-up" smart.

But it was a false alarm. The new arrival was not the Princess; nevertheless, she had a heralding as mysterious and complicated as any double line of white-gloved policemen could give.

It started by someone flickering an eyelash. Somebody else's flower-hat shimmered in response, and the nod that made it caught and scintillated in little flashes on the breast jewellery of a great lady sitting in a group by the first drawing-room door. That lady's fan and a glance over it passed over to another lady and transformed what had been her pretty mouth into a button; the button was reflected by a tossed head, the toss by a shrugged shoulder, the shrug by a well-fitted back wheeled suddenly round, the tee-totum by a startled "Really!", the "Really!" by a "Dear me!", and the "Dear me!" blossomed forth into the full expression, "I wonder how she dare!"

"Lady Phillippa Finroy," said the butler at the door. A very beautiful woman entered and stood a moment on the threshold, looking around her. She was pale to the lips, but this colouring seemed to be constitutional, rather than conditional, and went delicately with her dark, coppery-coloured hair, almost the colour of a copper-beech leaf, which was lifted in severe waves off her face, *à la Pompadour*. Her features were perfectly classical, and would have strongly resembled those of Mrs. Siddons, but that the mouth was too wide and strongly marked, the upper lip too raised and pouted. Her eyes were curious, being very cold in expression, but of that almost red-hazel that is sometimes called "marmalade-colour" that one sees sometimes in portraits of dames of old Venice.

She was of medium height—hardly, perhaps, tall

enough for her large features—but was so exquisitely dressed in a neutral-tinted velvet frock and Romney hat that she seemed much taller than she actually measured. As an alabaster statue of “Tragedy” she would have been perfect; or she could have sat for Lucrezia Borgia in judgment. But she hardly looked in character with the moment’s occasion.

“Walking in exactly like a cucumber!” murmured an indignant lady.

“How they dare! But society is becoming very rotten. It will be turning the other cheek to suicides next,” another replied. “We shall soon see all respectable people put in glass cases!”

“Should you be very sorry?”

“Hush!”

“But she was not to blame, was she?”

“No, but the fact remains that it *sounds* so dreadful.”

“That’s it—it’s the sound.”

The wronged wife still stood at the door facing with perhaps now rather whitened lips the battle array of lorgnettes as a man will hold a forlorn hope fronting overwhelming odds. She was looking for her hostess, who had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, after standing in the doorway with the gasps and the French fan up to this very moment.

The guest turned to the butler, who still stood just behind her to announce, to ask him in which room his mistress was to be found. But a deafness had now overcome him, his hand was to his shaven mouth and his blank eyes were on the ceiling. A sound that only women can make, something between a snort and a titter, went round the front ring of the assembly, and the more pious of the ladies picked up stray “woollies” from the tables on which they were arranged and examined them through glasses with close attention to the pattern. Ipecacuanah yearned at the cornice.

Just then a vague stir among the servants, a wider opening of the hall doors, and a nameless, interesting flutter all over the whole house announced the arrival of the Princess.

The hostess now suddenly reappeared from behind an ambush of British matrons flanked by pink under-clothing, swirled past the totally unwelcomed Lady Phillippa, who still stood, white and rigid, facing the fire of her enemies, and rustled headlong downstairs in time to see the Royal lady descend from her shabby carriage and to welcome her with sweet enthusiasm.

At that moment a hidden, but unfortunately audible, band somewhere behind some pots and palms at the top of the first stair flight struck up "God save the King" at a desperately rapid pace, with someone singing the words—a baritone—at a painfully slow one. The baritone won, being louder than all the band put together, but the result was a little unnerving from the crowd's point of view.

"But a bleasure—sotch a good cause!" the Princess Max was saying in her charming voice as she came up the stairs followed by her respectful hostess, and her attendant lady and gentleman, Augusta of the receded fringe, and Captain the Hon. Ninian Reece, a tall, limp, fair, young man, with watery eyes, so prominent in shape that it seemed possible to see through them sideways.

A path had of course been made in the crowd for Her Royal Highness's progress to a little raised dais at the end of the room, but to get to it she must pass through the boudoir. In doing so she caught sight of the deserted lady standing bleakly by it and paused suddenly.

"Ah, Lady Phillippa Finroy!" she cried in her odd little rallying fashion. "Dat you? Of course, because I ask you to come and help me choose the Japanese prints. So wonderful! So cleffare!"

Her nodding bow and smile, her tap on Phillippa's arm, were instantaneous, and she passed on to take her seat to open the affair, leaving a trail of sensation behind her. What followed was extraordinary. A frog-like chin that had been stonily averted now pushed itself into Phillippa's face, and the screwed-up eyes and many nods of it told her that the owner acknowledged her existence after all; this being a leader in a certain set. A dozen other heads nodded and wagged encouragingly in the same direction, and little purrs went round indicating a sudden consciousness that the whilom wife of Nigel Finroy, and the daughter of Lord Rackstock, was in the room. How funny one did not see her before!—but such a crush, dear! The Princess's few words had acted with the same magic as the kiss in the palace of the Sleeping Beauty; the spell broke and everybody woke up from a trance, and saw Lady Phillippa and acknowledged her.

On the dais Captain Reece and Augusta flanked the Royal lady like the ghosts of a very depressed lion and unicorn—Augusta, with her large nose and retiring brow, being the King of the Forest, and the unhappy courtier, long and pale and dreary, with a forked horn-like outline of nose, the heraldic beast. They both sat perfectly still with their pale eyes fixed unhappily on nothing, the Lion gingerly holding a little beaded bag and the Unicorn a top-hat with the immaculate lining showing.

Between these two supporters, flanked again by Mrs. Cates and that urbane society cleric Canon Slimson, the demure but undoubted vivacity of the Princess flickered daintily, and the brief ceremony was quickly over.

It was followed by a general rush towards the stalls upon which the gracious lady's own handiwork was arranged for sale.



But downstairs in the wide front hall a group of those men who always hide from opening ceremonies was collected, busy gossiping. Majorson was there, having arrived just after the Royal carriage, and a man known to both of them had introduced Terry Alders to him. That gentleman was staring with cold indifference at the front-door fanlight, the while he and Majorson were talking seriously, apart from the rest.

"I never found out," said Terry, in his sleepy fashion, "what he really did. We had one blazing row"—he stifled a yawn—"and I haven't seen him since. Sounds hard, for we've been friends for years. But it's that, or Lady Phillippa. You see?"

Majorson nodded.

"Did you ever see the girl?" he asked Alders.

"Yes, once. Droll thing. Nell Gwynne I called her. It's to be hoped she won't come to any serious harm." Alders thrust his hands into his pockets and examined the top of one boot.

But Majorson shrugged his shoulders, and the odd eyebrow seemed emphasized in his striking face.

"I had to do what I did, but that's the fear of the thing," he said. "No one wants to crush a woman under the law. I shall look into the matter, and if possible find out what becomes of her."

"Let me know if you do."

Just then Captain Ninian Reece came blinking and trotting towards them, explaining with nervous courtesy that Her Royal Highness wished to speak to Mr. Majorson.

Terry parted reluctantly, requesting to be allowed to come down and see the Cordwayners' church, clearly to continue the conversation, and the priest, preoccupied and concerned, obeyed the summons and went upstairs.

"Well?" said the Princess, a lurking mischief in her languid brown eyes as he came up. "Am I forgiven?"

"Your Royal Highness forgiven?" he asked.

"For that I talked to you scandal the other day. You did not like it, no? But it was a warning. I thought they would come to you, and I wanted you to be on your guard. There—that is enough! I never—I should not—explain! Do you see your handsome kinswoman here, Lady Phillippa?"

He glanced round the room, desperately puzzled. Phillippa here? After the ringing of such a scandal as the divorce?

"I invited her myself," said the Princess, perking up her round chin and playing carelessly with her bouquet of lilies and mauve orchids. "She understands Japanese prints, and there are some here that I may buy. I will have her advice. I let Miss Augusta Malins write to her about it."

She looked so unconscious and demure in her trailing mauve dress and her heavy-lidded eyes down on her flowers that he, knowing a little of women, became suspicious, then certain of her meaning. He was overcome with gratitude.

He suddenly stooped and touched one of the orchids lightly as though to examine it, and she did not remove the soft hand that lay lightly close to that very flower. The faint warmth of his lips breathed over the hand. When he raised his handsome head again her eyes were soft with tears and her lips tender.

"One does penance, sometimes," she said.

"Self-inflicted—for imaginary faults," he answered gently.

"You will speak to that sad Phillippa? I'll send for her to show me the prints."

Lady Phillippa was brought up and asked to lead the way to the print collection. She greeted Mr. Majorson in her cold, reserved fashion, but her eyes dwelt on him with a furtive searching once or twice as though curious to understand his attitude towards her and her cause. The Finroys and he had met so little in the old days of

her wretched marriage—Nigel had not cultivated clerical society at that gay period—and she hardly knew what to make of this distinguished-looking relative of his, of whom she had heard nothing except that he was the family Ritualist, with queer notions.

The party wended their way to the small room containing the prints, and Phillippa's knowledge, not merely of artist and period, but of lore and legend, quickly became evident. Her Lao Tzu on his white antelope, her Woman of the Waterfalls, her adored Utamaros, her Hokusais and Tokyunis, woke up in her strange white coldness a sort of hidden passion. She dwelt on the dim crimsony browns, the curious blue-greens, the translucent reflections, and the deep inner meanings of the concise old artists with a secondary thrill in her cold voice and a subdued fire in her traitless eyes which was a surprise, even an amazement, to her listeners. The Princess led her on to discourse on her conception of Buddhism, which she did well. There was the faintest shade of patronage in Phillippa's tone to Majorson throughout this little excursion, the patronage of the modern esoteric towards your priest of a commonplace ordinary Christianity, your mere Churchman. He was used to this attitude, and could afford to take it good-naturedly, as the man of the one fighting faith in the world can always afford to take the weak-jointed fatalists.

The Princess was charmed, and bought several expensive prints, making Phillippa promise to write out the legends of them for her, and handed the treasures, lightly wrapped in tissue-paper, to Captain Reece to carry.

Her party then went to make the round of the house and exhibits, and Lady Phillippa, making her adieux to her Royal restorer, was escorted by Mr. Majorson to the door. On the way downstairs they encountered Mrs. Cates, more flushed than ever, standing on her own

landing near the invisible band. She rustled forward eagerly.

"Oh, dear Lady Phillippa," she said, "I do want to explain."

"Is it?" said Lady Phillippa in gravely puzzled tones, her eyes fixed on the stuffed head of an animal on the staircase wall. "No, not a jaguar, I fancy. It is much more like a wild prairie cat, don't you think? The kind that hunt in droves on the plains of California. Carnivorous, they are, and very fierce. It *looks* like that species."

"Lady Phil——" pleaded Mrs. Cates.

"One can never quite see the use of these cruel, pitiless creatures," went on Lady Phillippa, proceeding with slow dignity down the stairs, followed by the unhappy Majorson. "They seem so unnecessary, so vulgar, in the benevolent scheme of creation. Why should they wish to crush and to tear? They hide in ambush for no other purpose, one would imagine. Yes, that is my carriage. Mr. Alders is going to see me home. Good-bye, Mr. Majorson. It is possible—even under the circumstances—that we may meet again?"

She departed in stately triumph with Terry, leaving Mrs. Cates wringing her hands and crushing two of the sticks of the French fan with chagrin at her own folly.

Nevertheless Majorson turned back with a sense of chill and repulsion. There was something deadly in the calm coldness of Nigel's beautiful, wronged wife; something almost horrible. Actually, going back up the stairs, he preferred the insincerely gushing and changeable Mrs. Cates, panting over her broken fan and swallowed snub, almost tearful in her finery. She seemed so infinitely more human, and he talked to her in a kind congratulatory fashion that referred nominally to her exhibition but had its inspiration in herself.

On the stairs they met Captain Reece, looking anxious,



and nervously carrying the Japanese prints wrapped in tissue-paper.

"Pardon me—have you seen Her Royal Highness?" he asked them.

They had not, but Mrs. Cates eagerly volunteered to go in search of her.

"I think she is in the room at the end of that corridor," said a lady standing by; "there is an Irish lace collection there."

The unhappy gentleman immediately fled in that direction.

"The Princess?" said a young girl a little further up the staircase. "Oh no, excuse me, she went to the top of the house to see the collection of Celtic folk-jewellery."

Someone hurried after the Unicorn and sent him upstairs to the top, his coat-tails flapping limply in his nervous excitement.

"Have you seen a demented man asking for the Princess?" an old gentleman in the crowd presently inquired. "I met him in the billiard-room carrying something in tissue-paper under his arm. I put him on the wrong scent, as I thought he looked horribly like a deputation on anti-vivisection."

"Where did you send him?"

"Down into the servants' hall. I thought they'd deal with him better there. But he may have been after the spoons."

Everybody had a different tale. One had seen him on the balcony, another on the back staircase, another up in the children's nursery, another in the dinner-lift, but everyone had an impression of a wraith with tissue-paper flitting frenziedly in hall and salon, on balcony and staircase. In the end the Princess herself was kept waiting for her lost attendant, and could not leave until he was eventually found, still clinging despairingly to the

Japanese prints, on the leads in the fog. When he was brought back, trembling with exhaustion and apology, and placed in the carriage, the Princess only chuckled good-humouredly, but Augusta sat perfectly erect and dreary, staring recedingly at nothing, in apparent total unconsciousness that her companion in slavery had been lost at all; also total unconsciousness that he had been found again. Such are the uses of etiquette.

Majorson had to stay some time longer to see the thing through, but when he got back to his City vicarage he found two letters of curious import awaiting him. One was from the household at Cobdenmere, telling him that Sir James Finroy was dangerously ill, accompanied by a telegram which had evidently been sent after it announcing the old man's death from apoplexy. The other was a letter from Nigel, written on the return boat, and posted about three o'clock at Folkestone.

It was one of the finest studies in cynicism that even he had ever encountered. He held it up under the hall light and read it through twice, very slowly, but with mounting colour and hardening eyes and tightening mouth.

Nigel congratulated the Church of England on having been rather obliging for once in a way—as it had refused to marry him he had thrown up the idea altogether. A civil marriage was rot. As things were turning out—the Governor loosing this mortal coil, and the succession and all that—it was perhaps just as well the parsons had been so particular this time. They had themselves to thank if men of the world were driven to different methods. The young lady he left behind him in the French coast village (Lisy-sur-Mer, Villa Bearnais) had lost the most in the transaction. She would not love the Church—when she found out what it had done for her! But Majorson had himself to thank. He concluded:

"I am driven to quote the Merry Monarch on his death-bed. Perhaps you remember his words to his pious brother James? 'Do not let poor Nelly starve.' My reverend relative, it is your own fault if I say the same to you.

*"Do not let poor Nelly starve."*

"NIGEL MAJORSON FINROY."

So this was the disappointed bridegroom's revenge?

For a moment he stood arrested by the unspeakable callousness and impudence of it. But a City priest becomes used to human nature derobed of "company" manners, and the particular kind of cold heartlessness only possible to a sensualist was no very new thing to his professional experience of men, or women either, for that matter.

If there was to be a duel between himself and Nigel, well and good. He rose to his own part with militant enthusiasm. As Michael might have drawn his sword from its sheath, he took a fountain pen from his pocket and scribbled:

"Fallen sparrows are our especial care. Nelly shall fly yet.

"MAURICE HEBER MAJORSON."

He made all his arrangements to attend the funeral of Sir James in four days' time, went across to the Sisterhood which was affiliated to his Church, and saw to several duties.

That night a man in a rough black coat, with the collar turned up about his ears, leaned on the rail of the Boulogne boat and watched the cool cut of the turbine through the black night waters, as it went swinging through the rollers like a stone thrown through a glass hoop. The few stars, whose faint shine caught here and there a long grey outline of surf

in the heaving darkness, briefly touched the dogged sternness of his face and the steady futurity of his eyes. It was a blustery night, and few people remained on deck, and of these the few who noticed him, judging indifferently by something ecclesiastical in his cut, took him for a French *curé* returning to his own land.

They did not guess that he was a fighting Englishman, going out to war over a girl's soul. Especially English in presently wondering how on earth he was going to begin it without any sort of introduction.

## CHAPTER VII

"What though the storms the summer gardens rife,

O Margherita!

Still on the bough is left a leaf of gold."

SONG FROM "FAUST."

AT Lisy-sur-Mer the ending of summer, the ending of autumn, was one degree more desolately bedraggled than the same hour at any other small watering-place. Joy not only departed utterly from it but seemed to leave her old clothes and unpaid bills behind her to rot in a final caricature of her presence. Hardly a creature remained but a handful of the sulky hirelings who served the place during its holiday hours, quarrelling and snarling over the inevitable smallness of the takings.

In such a desert a solitary girl sat beating a pair of bare heels on a low limestone wall, with a little point of moody white chin turned towards the grey sea, a whirl of sandy wind all about her. Behind her lonely figure, inland under the low brooding of the dim sky, stretched the prim, treeless squares of French fields; and a kind of toy-brick game calling itself a town lay



just in her rear. Desolation lay over the whole, the desolation of the "off" season in a watering-place; the day after the folly.

The ridiculous little villas nearly all faced different ways. They seemed to have been flung down anyhow by a giant hand, with no regard to streets or sequence. Many of them had blue Venetian blinds drawn down for the winter, many were curry-coloured with arabesques and vandykes and trimmings of maroon timber, and dry sand surged up to their faded front doors. The last and shabbiest of the season's bathing costumes shivered in the wind, on a low line running out on to the beach, and a baby Casino sulked, shuttered and *perdu*, in the general sandy wilderness. In the sere dune-grass even what had once been blue gentians and hardy magenta champions had faded into brown ghosts and looked like immortelles on forgotten graves.

The blight of autumn was complete, the drear drone of coming winter sang moaning in the wind.

It was a sulky and forlorn figure that sat there facing out to the sea, in which she had been drearily wading, with a ruminant white face and pouted lips. Mischance, mischance! And such an old story, too old to excite anything but boredom or contempt from worldling or Pharisee. Too vulgar to earn any pity. Dimly, possibly, the adventurer of it felt this truth. If you should be picked up from the road and put into a golden coach only to be thrown down violently into the mud again while the coach rolled away you would possibly feel a little indignant and bewildered. That would be because you had traditions capable of being thus broken. The dull ache of a vague resentment against a totally unfair world was the only emotion the Cockney castaway was conscious of, if she was conscious of that. Little more vivacity of wrath or disappointment than an overclouded Bank Holiday, a torn blouse, or a broken shoe would have caused her.

It was all one. A big world of mischances dead against you from the start.

Suddenly she became conscious of a black figure on the sandy waste, approaching her from the direction of the flapping clothes-line, a man of medium height and decisive movements, very neat about the tread and ankle. He walked with his hands behind him, his head a little forward, and his attention fully focussed upon herself till he was within speaking distance of her. Then he came to a sudden abrupt stand and stood still, looking at her intently.

"Are you Elinor Lovekyn?" he said with sharp authority. She started and put her hands on the wall on each side of her, and tried to pull her bare feet up under her rather short skirt, ineffectually. Otherwise she sat still looking surprisedly and intently at him.

"Is Lovekyn your name?"

She gave a deep breath and a slow nod, still fumbling with her feet.

"Thanks to you—yes, it is," she replied gravely. "If you hadn't refused to marry me it might have been something else. As it is—it's Lovekyn."

He was clearly taken by surprise, and paused and studied the castaway for a solid five seconds, then said—

"So you remember me?"

"Of course. You are Mr. Maurice Majorson, and you have a City church. And I suppose you've come here from—him?"

"Not at all," he began, in his superior, ecclesiastical fashion, and then stopped suddenly, remembering that in a sense he did.

"Because I won't stand any more of his nonsense," the girl on the wall went on casually. "He's too full of fairy tales by half. If he's sent you here with another one, please go away—we don't continue this one in our next."

Mr. Majorson's arms seemed to come of their own accord from behind his back and fold themselves across his chest, and he settled his neat feet in the sand. His mouth tightened, and his gaze remained intent.

"It's a new serial, this one," he said, taking up her simile. "The tone is higher—of a more improving kind. Unless I'm much mistaken it'll have a long run before you've done with it."

She forgot her lack of shoes and suddenly kicked her crossed heels impatiently.

"How's it going to begin?"

"By my taking you prisoner," he replied suddenly. "I do that now from this moment. Count yourself arrested. You come back to England with me to-night."

She opened her mouth and eyes into round "O's" and stared at him, half mockingly.

"Oh, *do* I?" she said pertly.

"Get down off that wall, Elinor," he commanded.

"They call me Nelly."

"Get down off that wall, Elinor."

She slid down in an unwilling amazement, and began picking up her sandy shoes and stockings.

"Who are your parents?"

"I've only got a father, and he's dying of cancer."

"And you've left him?"

"I left him—to—to—earn some money for him," she answered, her hard gaze wavering for the first time under his severe regard, and weakly shaking the sand out of her stockings in little jerks.

"I see. He is very poor?"

"Starving, he was. Till——"

"That is a matter I will look into and put right. What we've got to do in your case is more difficult, much more difficult."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Find your moral nature."

"What's that?"

"Your soul and spirit. Clearly they are asleep. But that's not fair to you. Everyone has a right to have a soul and a spirit."

"A what and a what? You talk so funny, like poetry and those things that don't mean anything."

"Doubtless I do. I talk of things beyond the stars to an unborn infant."

"But what are you going to do with *me*?—the bit of me that is this side of the stars?" she said with engaging concern, leaving off trying to wind her sandy stockings round her sandy shoes.

"Never mind. I shall decide how to dispose of you, never fear. Come along now. Put on—those things—and be ready to go back to the villa. There you must get your luggage put together, and be ready for the train to Boulogne and the six o'clock boat. No nonsense, now, and be quick!"

He turned round on his heel and strode sternly towards the villa in the little toy town, his hands again clasped behind him, to give her time to complete her toilet alone, and expecting her to follow. But instead of putting on her stockings she walked behind him in exactly the same attitude, her head slightly forward, her bare sandy feet placed with a neat precision, her hands clasped behind her.

They made a wild picture as they crossed the drift of sand towards the deserted houses, the handsome, grave ecclesiastic and the hatless barefooted girl walking single file and stepping exactly alike in a perfect rhythm of solemn movement.

But a gleam of sudden suspicion made Majorson turn round. Nelly was close behind him, and to avoid any collision she took a flying backward step, found herself on her magic feet untrammelled by shoes, lighted in three small jumps and broke into a dance.



Taken utterly by surprise, he did not say anything, but stood as he had turned watching her indignantly for a second, then gravely. He had never seen such a dance. She hardly seemed to be doing it herself. She drifted as lightly over the windy beach as a blown maple leaf, and with as little apparent self-volition. In such surroundings, at such a time, it was almost weird. Her flying figure against the long low sea line reminded him suddenly of the Undine legend. The sea waif conscienceless and rudderless. The movement seemed an epitome of her vagrant drifted life, an unconscious symphony of it. She could not, had she tried, have expressed herself to him better. He saw what it was Nigel had found so easy to pick up and throw away. He also saw, with a flash of the psychological genius which had made him adored as a parish priest, that this was the poor wretch's one form of self-expression. Her Cockney wit was a mere phraseology, a habitual defence that she had learnt with amazing quickness and used in lieu of something better. But it was this solemn white rapture of the face held up cup-like, the lifting of the white hands and feet, that had a passionate ritual of its own. And he knew it for the ritual of those vague reachings of the unawakened.

He let her finish without a word, stood looking seaward while she dressed and tidied herself, and then walked back with her to settle up her small affairs. This was soon done, and they started off together. They did not speak in the train to Boulogne, and he hurried her silently along the noisy, noisome Quai, past the Halle de Poisson, and through the intricacies of crazy traffic, frenzied motors and casual railway lines, beyond the dirty gendarmes expectorating round the shoddy Custom House, and through the mêlée of shouting beggars, to the boat.

It was not until they were settled on deck, and the

boat had got well clear of the great swinging pursuing arms upon the revolving flash-light that Majorson spoke again. He had placed her on a deck-seat and hired a rug for her as her dress was thin for a night voyage, and himself paced about at a little distance deep in thought. Coming up to her once, he said suddenly—

"I have to ask you something in your own interests. What did Mr. Finroy say—what excuse did he make on leaving you alone at Lisy?"

She looked up in wonder. "Why, none," she said.

"None?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"Well, then, how did you know he had deserted you?"

"He said he had bad news from England, and he kissed me and said I was a dear nice little girl and he'd always be my friend. So I knew."

"You knew?"

"Well, that's what they always say when they don't mean ever to see you any more."

He whistled under his breath and stared at her.

"Besides," she added, "you see he took the ring off and threw it away."

"The ring?" he repeated sharply, coming close up to her deck-seat. "What ring?"

She fixed her hard eyes steadily on the billowing distance.

"The one I wore," she said slowly and deliberately.

"To pretend—it was all right—to other people. You know."

"He made you do that?"

"Yes."

"Good God!" he said, and went away again. He was gone for a long time, striding up and down amongst the shadows of the upper deck. When he came back she had wrapped herself right up in the deck rug, even

over her head like a hood, and was staring out at the far lights with one of her slim hands at her breast, holding something close to her. The hand and her face looked dead white in the moonlight, and the fluttering wind blew the heavy wisps of her hair about her bright, odd, inhuman eyes. There was something more than witch-like about her. She might have sat for the woman in the *Ancient Mariner* playing dice with Death—"Death in Life."

Curious how the idea fitted her actual story, and the life she had proposed for herself.

Over the tossing silver plain the lights of Dungeness along their reaching arm of coast-line glimmered and shone like lamps on a distant altar; cold, clear, strange beyond their waste of waters. It was a wider sea than this on to which Nigel had cast the creature he was bringing home, a lonelier, more terrible expanse, a death more certain, a drowning more complete.

He did not speak again, and they disembarked under the thousand lights of Folkestone rising like gigantic Christmas-tree candles up its towned and wooded hill in mutual silence. The train journey was equally barren, and it was not until they arrived in town and reached the steaming, stuffy, lighted Strand and went along it in a cab to the City that Nelly asked—

"Am I going back home?"

"No, you are being taken to the care of some Sisters for the present. At all events, for to-night."

She nodded heavily and a little sulkily. She seemed disinclined to argue about her fate. A look of brooding and childish weariness had settled over her face, as though she was tired of trying to battle out a line of existence for herself. His steady decisiveness seemed to have given her at least a sense of security, if also of awe.

They left the main thoroughfare and went down Litany Lane, a high, narrow street, and the cab drew

up by and by at a house in this, a house so narrowed and wedged in by its neighbours that it appeared from the outside as though it could only contain a staircase and windows. It was less shabby than the houses on either side, which seemed to be let in separate floors as offices, from the inscriptions on the shuttered windows, but its appearance was very forbidding.

Heavy stone mullions faced its narrow casements, and the door was overhung with stonework and had a little iron grating in the middle of it. All this could be dimly seen in the cold, high light of a few electric globes placed sparsely along the narrow street.

A lady in the dress of a religious opened the door promptly to their ring, nodded to them both with the mechanically amiable smile of her class, and drew Nelly into the doorway by the hand. She seemed comparatively young, and had a small, very round face, and a bright colour, like a countrywoman's.

"Here is your charge, Sister Kate," said Majorson. "She is very tired. I'll see the Mother about her to-morrow."

They wished each other good night, and Nelly was taken at once to a tiny bedroom, with high ceiling out of all proportion to its width, containing the merest necessities in the way of furniture. Nevertheless to her it looked quite grand.

Actually there were three pictures on the walls, one an engraving of Ary Scheffer's St. Monica and her illustrious son gazing together at the vision of the beyond; an old and faded photograph in an Oxford frame of a High Church ecclesiastic in the 'sixties, in a biretta under which protruded "love curls" plastered over his ears; and an oleograph of a modern German Madonna, very treacly in treatment, but to Nelly a beautiful work of art.

The Sister pointed to the card of Rules hanging over the bed, the simulated wardrobe made of a serge



curtain on hooks, and a book of devotions on the small pitch-pine chest of drawers. Then, with an echoed, kindly formal good night, she withdrew. But Nelly did not attempt to go to bed. She went round the room on tiptoe examining everything with a knitted brow. When you have had to fight the streets of London with your wits to pick up a living, you naturally take philosophically to any safe lodging, especially on a cold night and after a journey. But there might be conditions connected with this particular lodging that no self-respecting castaway could accept. Cutting off your hair, perhaps, or wearing a black headgear like the Sister's, or stopping your dancing? But in that case one could run away.

The place was cleaner than the room that "Kerbstone Laura," her street friend, had let her share those few nights; but they were both alike in having conditions attached, after all. Laura had been coldly kind to get her to enter one strange life; these people just the same to get her to enter another. They were all very much alike, and all had ulterior motives, she reflected.

She produced a little cheap imitation leather bag and brought out several coins, some loose silver and two sovereigns. She wrapped the two gold coins up very carefully in paper, and taking out a stumpy pencil, licked it and wrote on it, "For rent and food, from N.," and put it on the chest of drawers ready for the morning. Then she dived into the front of her blouse and after a little feeling about produced another screw of paper, which she opened solemnly, revealing a small narrow gold wedding ring, quite new.

She put this on her third finger slowly, and sulkily studied it.

"He thought he threw it into the sea," she said. "Not that it makes an ounce of difference. But it shows what one meant to do. And dad can see it for

himself. And one day we'll be even, he and I. I'll see to that!"

She searched about and found a bit of black tape upon which she hung the tiny token, fastening it round her neck, and then, brushing out her thick hair, prepared for bed, lay down and slept the sleep of perfect insensibility, a slumber far less likely to present complications than that of the just.

But Mr. Majorson dismissed his cab and walked back down the dark street between the offices and warehouses, and went into the Vicarage adjoining the courtyard of St. Simon's. Without any hesitation he passed straight through the flagged hall, and opened a door communicating with another building, and up two flights of plain, uncarpeted stairs, knocked at and entered a door which led into a large raftered room very brilliantly lighted.

Shouts greeted him, cries of "Father Abbot," "Master Cordwayner," and through the cloud of tobacco smoke the faces of several men grinned a welcome that was taken for granted.

A seat was found for him, and a flood of talk, some questioning, some ejaculatory, was poured upon him, as he filled his pipe, lighted it, laughed and said nothing except a murmur of "Late, but time for one pipe."

The Cordwayners' workshop was a spacious room, made so by its being four attics with the partitions removed, and by day the lights came from the skylight windows in the raftered roof. Very few of the Brothers, however, could give their time till after eight o'clock in the evening, and it was under variously shaded lights, chiefly incandescent gas in hand-made watchmen's lanterns, that the principal craft work was done. Most of the men were wearing the dark grey cassock—the garment of the Order.

"Brother Larnaker is chopping away at his bishop," said a serious-looking man, spectacled and bearded, who

was himself working at a panel picture. "Had his nose off twice, he has, but getting his cope as Sarum as he wants—which is how you ought to treat a bishop, after all!"

"I see—congratulations!" said Majorson, leaning forward to look at the relieve figure of a St. Dunstan which Dan Larnaker, a tall, lanky priest, with a cassock too short for him, was carving in dark oak, going at it with hammer and chisel in fine style.

This brother now turned round and laughed.

"O Vicar," he said, "a new applicant for membership called to-day. He said you knew him, Mr. Terry Alders, of the Temple, a barrister. He seemed half asleep, and somehow keen too."

"Is that so? I met him only the other day, but his name was known to me. Curious! He was rather keen then for hearing about the work. Well, the Committee must decide as to his qualifications. What can he do as a craftsman?"

"It was what he could do that took my fancy. Music, anything in music, from performing and teaching it, to transcribing and to printing, plain-song and all. An authority on plain-song. Also miracle plays, pageantry, and medieval dances."

"What a list! Well, you must see to that and his private character yourselves. But you can write to him to come again about it if you care to. Send him to me and I'll put him through his paces—theological," he added.

"Do put Stephen Wallbank through his theological paces too, Vicar," said Brother Jalfin, his enormous eyebrows bent over a miniature printing-press. "I've told him again and again that a fifteenth-century angel stands on its feet, out and out on the ground. And yet he persists in making that *fowl* of his flapping its wings and tipping on its toes like a ballet-girl!"

"Look here," said Brother Stephen, the grave man

in spectacles, "you mind your own business. I go by Burne-Jones, who went by Francini, who——"

"Renaissance, Renaissance!" jeered Brother Jalfin. "Get away with your fanciful fairy seraphs on two-penny-ha'penny Easter cards! Giotto and Fra Angelico are good enough for me."

"Symbolism," persisted the bearded artist, painting on at his panelled angel in perfect serenity, "is the soul of didactics. I paint for didactics. Consequently my angel does *not* stand full on the earth, but poises on his wings——"

"And big toes," put in Jalfin.

"That's it. Quite so. He has little wings on his heels to show that he is a messenger and not an inhabitant of this incurable planet. The spirit of messengership is shown in his feet."

Majorson, smoking his pipe, stood in front of the picture, laughing at the dispute and studying the flame-winged cherub with its little ankle wings. The Rev. Dan Larnaker left his wood-carving and came up to him, saying under his breath—

"Found it all right, Vicar?"

"Yes. Left her with Sister Kate."

"Quite young, as you supposed?"

"Yes, quite."

"And I suppose quite without the saving—or rather savable soul?"

Majorson faced him with a sudden twinkle darting under the odd brows.

"On the contrary," he said. "She has one, but at present, like Stephen's angel, it is in her feet!"

"Her feet?"

"Yes. The soul in the sole. And I fear the only way to rear it at all will be to let her dance for her living."

Larnaker stared at him.

"But surely——" he began.



Majorson waved an impatient hand. "If she doesn't she'll dance for devilry. We have that alternative," he said. "Dancing may be a vice. Is it?" he added whimsically. "Miss Frubbert would tell you it was. But then I call one kind of parochial work a vice. All I can say is that if you want a plant to grow you must grow it according to its own tendencies, and not according to a pattern in Berlin woolwork."

Which truth left Brother Larnaker meditating over his pipe and his Sarum bishop. The Cordwayners had many uses from missions to music-printing, but up to the present they had not taught dancing.

Then his mind flew to his new recruit.

"Why, Alders will do for that!" he said. "What a lucky chance."

"I wonder if it is a chance?" said Majorson, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, while Jalfin called out—

"Service, sirs, service!" and lighted the candles of the little altar.

## CHAPTER VIII

"All faults are latent in all women, waiting only for opportunity to develop them."—DIARY OF BENJAMIN CONSTANT.

"To go to Brighton is not to run away at all," said Lady Phillippa indifferently. "At this time of the year it is equivalent to walking into the thick of a battle of vulgar criticism."

"One thought you would have gone abroad. But only a woman would prolong a martyrdom unnecessarily. I suppose St. Dorothy asked for some more firewood to fan the flames and then looked agonized. St. Laurence died of one roasting only, but he did die giggling."

"I should not allow anyone but you to tell me I looked agonized, even by inference," she replied with

still reproach. Terry Alders looked at the hotel lounge ceiling, as though deciding whether the elaborately carved and gilded cornice would or would not do.

"Whatever you looked you would grace it," he replied, and began humming a tune. To him Lady Phillippa Finroy was the one divine woman in a wide world of frumps and idiots, but even for her his ordinary method of bestowing praise was incapable of alteration. He paid you a compliment examining his boot-toe, and made love to you looking out of the window.

"I was glad to see your familiar face at the play last night," she said. "It was like old times. Are you making much of a stay?"

"Only a few days. I am taking up some new—well—duties. I don't know whether to call it that or pleasure."

"I heard that you had joined a brotherhood! Is it credible?"

"It is. So I have; sort of, you know. The Cordwayners, they call them; some fellows at a City church—chiefly business fellows."

She looked suddenly interested.

"Oh, isn't that at Mr. Majorson's church? Yes, of course it is. I met the family Ritualist the other day at an affair the Princess Max had in hand. Isn't that the man who refused——"

"Yes, yes, yes," he nodded hurriedly. "It is. Three cheers for him, I said when I heard of it. And three more when I heard of something else."

"What?"

"That he went and reclaimed the girl."

She was silent a moment, looking at him and mastering something that swelled her white neck above the square-cut edge of her lavender-coloured frock.

"You mean the thing that man threw away?" she said.

He raised a deprecating hand, without looking at her.

"Well, well," he said quickly under his breath. "But I am a man who cannot see a violin thrown away and trampled in the mud, or a trilly-voiced singing lark plucked, or a performing poodle vivisected without screaming. Those are about the only sort of things that would make me have a downright bout of hysteria, but they really would. There!—now you have my weakness."

"But was this—unfortunate being—a violin?" she asked.

"Dancer and mimic," he replied.

"And you care artistically?"

"Yes, that's it."

He laughed consciously, and cut the end off his cigar. Lady Phillippa watched him, a sharper interest than criticism hidden in her strange, serious, reddish eyes. His delicately cut, roundish face, with the little aquiline nose and prematurely grey hair, had a certain neat quaintness about it, especially when, as on such an occasion as the present, he put off the dusty boredom of his professional manner and showed the pulsing of his emotional and artistic nature.

She had come down to Brighton directly after the divorce, and had only run up to town for Mrs. Cates's exhibition at the Princess's request. She was not quite sure whether her encounter of Terry Alders at the play last night was altogether a coincidence, but in any case she meant to use it. As an old friend of both Nigel and her own, she had sufficient excuse to invite him to the big crowded hotel at which she was staying with a woman-companion, and talk over things that it would be impossible for her to discuss with the rest of the world.

"He now gives out that the marriage is postponed owing to family mourning," she said, schooling the hatred out of her voice.

"Yes, I know. And he is wearing a crape hatband that would render the Evil One himself respectable! He is soon to set up as the noble young landowner with earnest reform views, I am told. Already he has made some graceful remarks to the neighbouring gentry, ex officio, of course, but straws showing the way of the wind. He has a wonderful genius. He always believes in what he is doing at the moment. I wish I did."

Lady Phillippa remained silently playing with a pearl rope that hung round her neck nearly to her knees, twisting it tightly round her forefinger as she sat back in the luxurious lounge seat. For the first time Terry noticed that her fingers had large knuckles, slightly too large for beauty, and a little out of keeping with the clear cameo line of her face. It annoyed him vaguely as a sign of energy and hardness, and he spent his whole life warring crossly against energy. He would not believe that such a, to him, saintly, perfect woman as this could possibly be energetic.

"If what you say is true," she said, "and I can quite believe it, knowing him as I do, the violin need not be crushed and trampled in the mud at all. Why, she might make her fortune at blackmail! She has a clear case for breach of promise, and in this instance, as Sir Nigel Finroy, with a newborn desire to shine as a man of big social ideas and so on, she would have a tremendous hold over him! Think what a situation!"

She said it banteringly, but her red-fired eyes looked sharply at him for a second as she spoke, then dropped modestly to dead-white cheek, to the pearl rope again.

"Hateful!" he replied hotly. "Don't let us joke about such horrors."

"I'm not joking, I assure you. Blackmailing is quite a respectable accepted position nowadays. You, as a lawyer, only see the other side of it. I see the social success it is. Lots of women that one meets at good



houses live by it, almost acknowledge that they do. Why, there are two well-known ones in this crowd alone. Look over there at that exquisitely gowned woman standing by a pillar. She is a famously successful blackmailer, and much better off on it than I am on honesty. The Racebys had to pay a cool £15,000 to silence her tongue only the other day. She is spending some of it here—she has two gorgeous motors and heaps of friends—but I have no doubt she is also here on business. She shows a graceful interest in my own movements at the present time. I keep my companion, Mrs. Milson, very close to my heels, you may be sure. This is one of the joys of my present position.”

He laughed, but it was half a groan. No wonder she talked bitterly, but it was horrid to hear her, all the same. Would the position of divorcee twist the sweetness out of an angel? For a woman, even an innocent woman like this, it would seem to be a kind of moral thumbscrew, altering all the proportions by its continual slow agony. She had always seemed to him a creature of alabaster purity, of a stately dignity and womanliness that raised her above the ordinary chances and conditions of human experience. He hated to see her even touched by this change in her domestic life, when all the world knew her blamelessness. He glanced contemptuously over at the harpy by the pillar as she was pointed out to him—the usual type of society feminine rogue, a creature whose battenning capacities were writ large on her hag-ridden, nutcracker face and bedizened dress, over rich for the time and place. A little woman, not much made up, but with eyes so heavily bisted that they stood out from the rest of her face like an alligator's, and the rather scaly nature of her dress, which was of rich green embroideries, added to this effect.

“The local colour is so strong,” said Lady Phillippa

wearily. "If you really are a reptile, acknowledged, I suppose you rather enjoy dressing as one. But under the same circumstances I should avoid it myself. If one crawls in the grass, that is for the dark, after all. It is not pretty to crawl in public."

He rose to go. Lady Phillippa rose too and walked with him through the frankly staring crowd to the door. On the way she asked him a few quick questions about Nelly, her name, her parentage, and where she was living. So pathetic, poor thing. Was she really so clever, so talented?

"She's got the germ of it," he replied. "I am trying to train the little misery myself, just to get her a living as a drawing-room entertainer, or something of that sort. She'll never get it in the usual routine way of her class. Even Majorson saw that; in fact, he said so from the first. He may be a parson, but he isn't a fool."

"He is a very charming man," said Lady Phillippa. "I am one of the many people in love with him. And so he has let you begin to teach her—what?"

"Recitation, singing, and dancing. She is a monkey for imitations!"

"Really? I am so interested. I shall want to hear some more of this. If you need my help——" He wrung her hand, and she smiled so earnestly at him, with such a sweetly saddened, womanly air, that he almost forgot the impression of disappointment that had spoilt their talk. What a woman in a thousand!—to stoop to speak charitably of the miserable creature who had been so ghastly an addition to her own social martyrdom! How heroic she could be, how brave, how long-suffering. There were heroic women left in the world still, then.

Phillippa stood a moment in the porch, watching him go along the moon-lighted asphalt of Brighton front into the shadows made by the scudding of wind and

clouds over the moon, and then turned back to the hotel atmosphere—flowers, band, music, lights, chatter, cigar smoking, coffee fumes, and over all that eternal unconquerable smell of dinner, which no hotel seems quite able to eject. She passed swiftly through the staring, criticizing crowds to the lift, and up to her own private apartments.

"Isn't that the divorced Lady Phillippa Finroy?" said a homely-faced, much-bugled lady to a picked-up acquaintance, with holy horror in her eyes.

"Yes," said the other out of a tight blouse of coffee lace and lumpy jewellery, in superior accents. "Sad affair, most sad, poor thing!"

"Oh, then it wasn't her fault?"

"Her fault! Oh no. Didn't you read the papers? A martyr, quite. The law proved it. A most noble, blameless, saintly woman, and the daughter of Lord Rackstock. Viceroy, one year, he was to us. A most splendid old family, some of our first aristocrats. Our best people. Of course there was no blame, no blame."

"Still," persisted the bugled one, looking puzzled, "Mr. Finroy was an aristocrat too—why he's Sir Nigel already—and somebody was to blame, so it must have been him. Even the best people——"

"Really," said the coffee-lace blouse. "I don't understand you at all. Mr. Finroy—Sir Nigel, I mean—is not an aristocrat, my dear lady. His father was a wool merchant who got a little money in the City, and got titled for political piety carried to nausea. They only *made* him a baronet. These people are the Majorson Finroys, an old City stock, but quite that—and that only. Mere upstarts in Debrett. Their morals might be anything, would be likely to be. But Lady Phillippa is most wonderful. The Princess Max is devoted to her."

The lady in bugles retired bewildered and snubbed.

Your morals were shaky because you were only a person who had earned your title, a mere City Majorson Finroy, not someone who inherited it in any event of criminality or imbecility as the case might be. Her bugles rose and fell on her disappointed breast. She had always so fondly and religiously believed that blatant vice was the special prerogative of the nobly born. Robbed of it they seemed crownless, meaningless to her simple, faithful mind.

But Phillippa, up in her room, sat and looked long into the fire, with her hand to her face, perfectly still and cold and absorbed. Was this the hour of darkness for creeping in the grass that she had spoken of to Terry? It looked like it.

Presently there came a timid rap at the door, beginning very softly and working up to a high crescendo, like the breathing of a patient far gone in the Weir-Mitchell disease, and then dying down again to a low twitter.

Lady Phillippa called "Come in" quickly and sharply, to prevent herself being driven mad by this horror.

The lady who was now acting as her *dame de compagnie* entered on soft feet, slightly sideways, after the way of a polite crab. Was she required? Could she do anything? She did not like to retire without, etc. etc. Phillippa shook her head, restlessly annoyed at the disturbance.

Mrs. Milson was sallow, slender, and irreproachably dressed in black, with the sparing transparencies of the socially uncertain. The heavy weight of her dark fringe which terminated in a kind of gummed curl like a note of interrogation on her forehead, rather enhanced than disguised a certain corpse-like effect produced by her heavy-lidded eyes set in very deep cavities. She was, of course, the usual officer's widow, and had the usual appearance of having been born, bred, reared, and per-



fectured in a boarding-house. Poor soul, it was possible that her whole outlook on life was as one huge boarding-house, and she had caught the particular blight which so often falls on those who adopt that mode of existing.

"Very stormy night," she said, in a voice that sounded as though it came from a tomb. The wintry wind, muttering round the chimney-stacks, moaned in keeping with her accents.

"Very," Phillippa replied, her eyes on the fire.

"You seem low. Why not take to a game of patience on these occasions, or shall I show you how to play cribbage?"

Lady Phillippa looked at her for a moment with a hard, uncomprehending stare, then laughed outright.

"Sit down, Milly," she said, indicating a seat opposite her own, and lying full back in her own chair, with her hands clasped over her eyes. "You look like a ghost. You carry with you the odour of ghosts. Your voice is like a ghost's voice. Your remedies for my distraction are the thin ghosts of remedies employed by dead women in Tunbridge Wells a hundred years ago. Consequently you must be an authority on ghosts. Now tell me, do you think they are of any use in these days, that anyone can be got to believe in them, or be scared by them—particularly a man?"

Mrs. Milson did not reply, but having a gummed note of interrogation on her forehead, and a chronically enquiring expression, she could be taken to have asked for an explanation of this mystic nonsense.

"Do you think the ghost of a sin does any more than merely get at one's respectability?" persisted Phillippa. She was one of that vast band of people who feel a glow of cleverness in deliberately puzzling a fellow-creature of clearly inferior mental grasp.

"It is said," Mrs. Milson replied oracularly, "that murderers are always haunted by their victims pointing bony fingers round corners, that drowning men see all

their past life come before them as in a flash, that forgers see the writing on the wall, and that unpleasant women that no one could possibly know cry at the sight of children and spring flowers. We know ourselves, alas! how the memory of past days must ever cloud our brightest hours and——”

“Thanks. A comprehensive list,” said Phillippa. “It sounds as though the ghosts were very busy. Well, I have to-day discovered how some such wraith may possibly be of use to me in getting at my enemy. Perhaps you may be asked to help.”

Mrs. Milson agreed fully, with distended eyes and pursed-up mouth, clearly much excited. To her life was one long card-fortune, with, poor soul, her own fortune left out. You had an Enemy with a capital “E,” and a Man in your life, and Dark Women intervened, and Money Bags arrived (in her case they had departed), and your favourite flower affected your destiny with fearful inevitableness. She therefore rose to the idea of intriguing against an enemy for Lady Phillippa, and was so overcome at the thought that she persisted in bringing a pack of cards out of a small sequined bag, that hung at the side of her dress, and telling the future of this secret matter. Unhappily that class of information is a little crude and sketchy. Had it been able to go into detail, even Phillippa might have been startled.

But Terry went back to town earlier than he had intended, and began to be a little lost to society in the absorption of a new interest that had taken hold of him. People said it was funny for Alders to turn monk, but then you never could account for the vagaries of such a cranky fellow. The Temple Chambers saw very little of him those evenings. He used to go eastwards on a 'bus-top, and climb up to the Litany Lane workshop with the enthusiasm showing under the sleepiness like a vivacious face under a veil.

During the early part of the evening his employment was in a disused schoolroom, but later on he was upstairs with the Brothers working out knots and problems of old church music, and making the welkin—of Brother Jalfin—ring with the daring of his suggestions for the musical ritual of St. Simon's.

How glorious to sit and fight over the exact date of a particular German chorale, and its relative merits to those of French traditional melodies from some old Rouen gradual! But always the coldly strange face of Phillippa remained in the innermost place of his thoughts as on an altar. There was never such a woman. Some time her influence might help his little pupil, since, with her divine tenderness, she had offered it. Could he accept such a sacrifice? Your cynic is always the most hopeless sentimentalist in the world.

## CHAPTER IX

" Love is swift of foot,  
Love's a man of war,  
And can shoot  
And can hit from far."

GEORGE HERBERT.

BUT the Master Cordwayner's troubles had but just begun. You do not take to your quiet home an unknown quantity in the shape of a wild-footed girl without encountering certain adventures.

For the first two or three days after his return home with his queer charge Majorson was too busy to think much of her affairs, and she was left in the care of Sister Kate to make what she could of her new surroundings. He was himself obliged to go down to the funeral of Sir James Finroy at Cobdenmere parish church, and in spite of himself, to catch a glimpse of Nigel's mourning, pomp-ridden face in the procession. That was in the

autumn-wet graveyard, surrounded by brickfields. With theatrical readiness Nigel had quite wholeheartedly buckled to his task of grief-stricken heir and was doing it with wonderful effect. Nevertheless the slightly foolish, sheepish air of a rake suddenly forced to play a solemn part over a black tie for the benefit of the general public, showed clearly through the excess of wet emotion that he conceived proper for the occasion. Or did he really feel it? Even Majorson, sickened at the very sight of him, recognized that it might be only partly done to please the neighbours and tenantry and the deputies from London, great personages who had come down to do proxy-mourning, and be in part a weak regret splashing up its feeble tears too late to be of use to the dead man on the catafalque.

But solemnly vowing never, if he could help it, to speak to any Finroy again, he came back to town, mentally washing his hands of the man and all his moods and delusions. Some men would have thought it their duty to make that occasion an opportunity for one more appeal to Nigel's better nature. It was characteristic of Majorson's passionate independence that he refused to do so.

The whistles and shouts, the motor-horns and traffic thunders of London sounded jovial and cheerful to him as he re-entered it, and his huge grey wilderness of warehouses stretching away east a little beyond the main noise and bustle seemed a homely place, teeming with interest and possibility.

This vast, dirty, grey, busy thing was real and alive. After the Kentish brickfields and the sham grief in the rain it seemed a regularly jolly affair, and all the width of his interests, the human side of his work, the love of his church and its wealth of gemmed beauty, and the enthusiastic oneness of the men about him, seemed to rise up and meet him like a breath of warm incense as



his eyes lighted on the broken line of dun-tinted walls and roofs, the cranes, the towers, and chimney-shafts. Such ugly things can become so beautiful to those who give themselves.

Now he must tackle the question of the little queer-eyed castaway, his capture, he said, as he put his latch-key into the Vicarage door. Sister Kate stood waiting for him in the hall.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Father," she said. "But I must speak to you about Elinor Lovekyn. A slight difficulty."

"Come in," he said, turning into a little waiting-room. "What has happened?"

"Nothing serious, but it has made a little trouble," she said. "As a matter of fact, the second morning she slipped away and disappeared."

"She has run away?"

"Well, we thought so at first. But she came back in two hours. She had been down to see her father, who is dying, she said. She would explain no more. It is in the East End, I understand. Now she is—taciturn, and refuses to speak, even to me."

"Well, well. I must come and see her and scold her myself. It's true enough about her father though, I believe. Anyhow, now I'm back again I'll go off at once and see. Naturally you were worried as she was in your charge, Sister."

"It wasn't that so much. But Miss Frubbert got to hear about it, and she came round to the Sisterhood, and there was a dreadful scene. The Mother Superior was quite upset by her. We could hardly get her out again."

"But what impudence! It is not Miss Frubbert's business."

"Father, she says it is," purred the rosy Sister meekly, her eyes on the ground for very obvious reasons. "She says that Elinor should have been

sent to the Rescue Home at which she is one of the Committee. She says she will have the young person conveyed there without delay. She says she will write to the Archdeacon. She said all that, and quite an amount more, putting on her goloshes, standing on one foot, in the Sisterhood hall. We stood round."

The neatness of this picture nearly upset Majorson's gravity.

"They do take a long time to put on, those goloshes," he replied. "They're long things. They and the tongue—but come, Sister, after all, how did she find out about the girl Lovekyn's being there at all?"

"Miss Finny called with some clothes for the Crèche children," the small veiled lady replied, with the queerest pinching of her mouth. "She *may* have told her, sir."

"She may, she may!" Majorson tossed his head back in his own irritated fashion. Miss Finny was Miss Frubbert's known jackal, a feeble-minded little busybody, a thorn in the side of any society, lay or parochial, to which she attached her twittering self. The ridiculous little plot of paltry espionage was plain enough to his mental vision; he really might have expected it.

He dismissed the demure Sister with a laugh and a promise to put all right, and went that evening by 'bus to Bethnal Green to find out the Lovekyn ancestry, and if necessary administer relief. The stately blue-eyed Mrs. Higglar was in charge, as usual, and did not advise a permanent return of Nelly to the alley. That is, since she had found good and respectable friends. "Once they've got the itch to the West, sir," she said seriously, "they give up all ideas of living a proper life."

"Oh, but she is in my care. I will see that she leads a proper life," he said sharply.

"Still, sir, after all, you come from the West yourself. To's that wear white shirts do have such notions.

They laugh at the things we should knife each other for."

"No, no, the difference is only in the kind of knives used!" he said, shaking his head. "Even we white-shirted ones fight!" He laughed grimly as he thought of Nigel.

"Well, I hope she'll do you credit."

"I shall insist upon it," he said.

She shook her head. "You'll have to tie her feet, sir."

"I intend to free them," he answered.

He went in and saw the invalid, who, however, was asleep. He tried to persuade Mrs. Higglar to let him go into the infirmary, with the usual result of obstinate opposition.

"Charity, sir, he shall *not* have!" said the matronly young dragon, in her sturdy fashion. "So long as I and Mine (this title indicated Mr. Higglar) have a roof to cover us he shall have all we have."

"But that is charity," said Majorson.

"Indeed, sir, it is nothing of the kind!" flashed the hair-pinned one. "It's given willing, it's given glad, it's given without a sneer or a snarl or a patronage. Kindness it may be, but charity it is *not*."

These puzzling shades of definition were quite familiar to Majorson as a parish priest, but he shrugged a little. Even the haughty Mr. Lovekyn, who must not have charity, had not scrupled to take poor Nelly's money, he gathered.

"But bless you, he won't need the infirmary," Maggie added, her voice dropping gently. "He'll be gone by the time they cry narcisse in the streets. Watch and see."

She had a poetic way of fixing all dates by the flowers hawked on the London kerbs, as a countrywoman will do by the field produce or the farm routine or the weather signs. It was a curious instinct for Nature, inherited perhaps from her Essex peasant ancestors,

finding its expression in the only things of Nature that came near to her own range of experience.

"Narcissus! Isn't that Easter?" he said thoughtfully, himself with a totally clerical view of flowers, as existing to be put on altars only.

"Easter!" said Maggie derisively. "Come, sir! It's as early round the year as the muffin-bells stop!"

Majorson stroked his chin at this conundrum.

"Well, I'll see you again about it," he said. "I have given orders for Elinor to be taught a trade by the sisters of our Sisterhood—carpet-making by hand—and she shall come down here and see her father and bring him some of her earnings twice a week for the present."

"I'm glad she's really going to work honest at last," said Maggie coldly. "She doesn't deserve your kindness."

"As I don't deserve Heaven's," replied he, and went back to Litany Lane.

That evening he was busy with a big guild service in the church, but during the festal Magnificat he noticed the small watching face of Elinor fixed steadily towards him over the top of the Lord Mayor's pew, into which some humorist had put her, probably Jalfin. The old civic seat of honour faced down on to the side of the chancel, and was a lovely specimen of black oak carving after Grinling Gibbons, and probably contemporary with the master; and the determined little white face looked out from between two sword-rests, mellowed by the flicker of tall tawny candles, and pressed on to a pair of hands clearly clasped to order. In the musty, ancient place she looked some prisoner of past days, Jane Grey in the Tower or Elizabeth Lamballe in the Bastille; yet there was more of defiance in the meekness than those fair saints had shown. Joan the Maid on trial, with the upright sword-rests and candles and the cowled sisters at the side, came nearer the mark.



Just like Jalfin though ! Absurd to put such an unhappy waif in the stately place where Sir Richard Whittington, so legend had it, had once knelt to hear Mass.

Turn again, Whittington,  
Lord Mayor of London,

ran the legend of that civic romance ;

Turn again, Elinor,  
Lady of London,

might not be such an impossible legend in all London's infinite possibility of romance ! Then he smiled a little to himself, as he remembered that she bore the very name of a famous old Lord Mayor of London, Lovekyn, one of the oldest of City names.

In spite of Nigel, she should have a chance to realize her possibilities, or he would know the reason why.

After service he sent for her to his study. He must get that scolding over now or never. She came at once.

"Well, Elinor," he said sternly, as she stood before him with folded hands, very meek. "Why did you run away ?"

"To see my father, sir, and to buy a pair of stockings." He paused a moment, but she was quite grave. He remembered the shoeless dance on the sandy waste. She looked extraordinarily different already, after a few days of a convent "smoothing out" process, and her witch-like prettiness shone well from this demure setting.

"You should have asked the Sister's permission before going," he said. "Though naturally you wanted to see your father ; still you mustn't run about like that."

"But it was because I didn't want to run about like that that I went out and bought them," she said seriously. "The ones I had on were the only pair I had."

"Absurd, absurd! The sisters could have got you any clothing that you wanted, you know that."

"With whose money, sir—Father?"

"Mine. Why do you say 'Sir Father'?"

"It seems rude to use one without the other," she replied, and rather disarmed him by the reply. Hitherto she had not wished to avoid rudeness. Here was a point gained.

"I see. Well, one will do, one will do."

"If you were a young woman, Father—sir—instead of a monk, you'd know that one wouldn't do! Really."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean one stocking, or one pair of stockings."

"Now you are trying to be impertinent."

"I'm not," she flashed out angrily. "I thought that was what you were talking about, and as you said they were to be got with your money I thought you'd better know what would be expected!"

He looked long and hard at her under his brows, but could only discern a serious frankness akin to Maggie Higgler's. It was quite evidently a racial habit, hieing from Cat and Mutton Alley and the eastern marshes, a terrible weird directness and simplicity, curiously without guile, curiously upsetting.

"Well, well, any such necessities shall be seen to by the sisters," he replied. "And I'm not a monk. Do please get rid of that idea, once and for all."

"Very well, Father," she replied, and stood looking at him with so clear a desire to probe him and find out what on earth he could then call himself, that he proceeded rather hastily to tell her of his visit to her father and his plans for her to earn a little money by her own industry.

Her thanks were so pretty that when he dismissed her it was with the first faint sensation of pleasure in the curious task he had set himself. And he smiled suddenly at the idea of having not only to rear a

spirit in a marsh-witch but also to buy her pairs of stockings!

One day Larnaker called him from the staircase, saying, "O Vicar, do come up a moment. It's worth seeing."

He went up to the workroom and found two of the brothers at the window leaning out and looking down into the school-yard. Shouts of distant laughter ascended up through the still, wintry air and the now bare branches of the plane tree.

It was the lunch hour, and a group of young women teachers and big children stood round the yard and howled with delight at an immense figure wrapped up like a mummy in a dozen swathings and shawls and mackintoshes till its bulk was enormous, and wearing huge goloshes on both feet and another on its head.

The giant padded the yard to and fro, to and fro, shouting forth remarks in a lusty voice to the ecstasies of the audience.

"Take me on the Flip-Flap!" it cried, flapping its immense feet in practical illustration. "Why am I on the Committee of the Tooral-oorals, except to arrest you all for your frivolity!"

With a sweeping arm it tore off a motor-hood; then, continuing its march, threw off two huge driving-gloves, following that with a coat, a shawl, the head golosh, and finally, standing on one foot, very awkwardly and violently tugged off the immense india-rubber canoes from off its feet and whirled them deftly at the heads of the principal children. Roars greeted this finale. Out ran Sister Kate from a side room with her teeth in her lip and a scarlet face, showing that she had been watching, seized the figure, and pulled the final scarf from off the head and revealed the terrible Elinor, laughing and shaking her head like a puppy.

She was hurried back into the school-house and the

door shut promptly upon her, and the tableau ended as briskly as it had begun.

"But who is it?" said one of the brothers, who was a new assistant priest and could not understand the chuckles of the others.

"Come with me to the Rescue Committee!" said Majorson, turning away to go back to his work. "The original of that little sketch is parochialism incarnate. She helps forward Church work by showing us all how not to do it."

"But who is the pretty girl in the school-yard?"

"That's another story. We're trying to rig her out with a conscious moral nature, but at present she is corrupting the Sisterhood to open mutiny against the gods of the Committee! I suppose I must forbid it! What a pity high spirits aren't a virtue, isn't it?"

He laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and went off with his hands in his cassock pockets. Who could scold so mad a thing for such a clever piece of acting?

Probably it was only an outburst after so much good behaviour: For she was coming to the services now, and letting herself be taught many things besides the carpet-making of Sister Kate and the music lessons of Brother Terry, and French and grammar of the L.C.C. evening classes. She really was struggling to be good and to imitate all that she saw about her. If she also imitated Miss Frubbert could he say very much?

He had settled that redoubtable lady by a grim letter to which he had received no reply, she being possibly engaged in complaining by savage missive to the (rather tired out) powers that were. . . . His wars with her never reached a real ultimatum unhappily. She was one of those persons whom you offend every moment of your existence and yet never succeed in offending satisfactorily.

One day shortly after this he went down again to Cat and Mutton Alley, passing from the wider City



into the long drab and noisy thoroughfares, flanked by slums, of that mud-spattered region. The factories were just releasing their "hands" for midday, and the "dinner-whistles" were booming and screaming, a cheerful chorus of sound. Rows of girls swarmed out into the main streets, walking sedately in long lines of eight and ten at a time, with pretty vivacious faces and extraordinarily neat hair, rolled round in halo fashion, and flat tam-o'-shanter hats pinned on with long pins.

Their flower faces were the only gay things, the only things of hope in the long drab sketches, and squalor and misery, and mud and vulgarity. So many Nellys! —so many poor little lilies and roses of God trying to grow up out of the vileness and hopelessness of a city's foulest materialism!

In Cat and Mutton Alley the ladies propping themselves each at her own front door, hands carefully rolled under aprons, bead-necklaced and metal-pinned, stared at him to-day with grave and solemn interest as he went up the courtyard.

He felt the import of it in the air. When Mrs. Higgle opened the door to him dressed all in black and told him that Mr. Lovekyn had passed away peacefully in his sleep he was not surprised.

Mrs. Higgle's crape was very shiny, if not quite black, and the row of metal pins on her broad forehead were disposed with extra gravity, and a pair of long jet earrings representing funeral urns with cloths over them had replaced the usual golden dangles.

She told the brief story simply, with unconscious dignity, clearly unaware that many weeks of almost hourly nursing of a sick neighbour counted at all for righteousness in her own case.

"I'd like to see Nelly come to the funeral, sir, if you'll send her," she said. "She ought to let the neighbours see her show respect. The Alley will have black tie-ups on the donkeys' ears, and wreaths in glass shades

in all the windows. It'll be a big funeral, with two fine coaches and men with long hat-tails."

"Will it?" he said, knitting his twisty brows at the idea. "Who will pay for it?"

"The money is here," she said proudly, bringing several small soiled paper packets out of her pocket, counting them, and laying them in a row on her hand. Various legends were scribbled on these in pencil, one "For sheets, from N.," and "For food, from N.," and finally "For rent, from N." He looked at them in wonder.

"These represent some pounds," she said. "They're the bits of money Nelly brought here from time to time, hiding and creeping up the Alley after dark. I got him all the things it says on it, but I would not spend such money on a dying man. It was not fit and proper, for it means shame. I kept it for his funeral, for that will be done for *her* pride, not his. He has none, now."

Majorsen went back to Litany Lane, a little stirred and self-reproachful that he had judged Nelly as heartless. At least she had given what she had to the suffering man, who now lay at peace.

When he entered the Sisterhood schoolroom he found her with Sister Kate in front of a wooden loom, perfectly serious and taking a lesson in altar-carpet making. This had become her daily task, as by it she could immediately earn trifling sums herself, a plan of her rescuers. The Cordwayners' shop found a fair sale for these things, and the sisters made quite an industry of the work. Now there is perhaps no more beautiful attitude for a woman, except harp-playing, than loom-carpet making. He noticed it for the first time as his eyes lighted on this exponent of it. The low-seated figure, the raised arms, the thrown-back head and chin, the intent gravity of the eyes and pursing of the lips, all thrown out clear against a curtain of dim, soft

colours and fluffy threads, the whole enhanced by the curious nameless charm that attaches to unconscious industry—Nelly gave the effect of a shadowed fresco as she turned her head from such a task and looked seriously up at him.

He stood and looked down at her, surprised at this touch of personal grace, after the folly in the school-yard but yesterday. Then he called Sister Kate aside and told her what he had come to impart. The Sister heard him, and then withdrew to a corner of the low-ceiled room, and he went up to Nelly, who had risen slowly to show respect for him, and took her hands for the first time and told her of her loss.

Perhaps he studied her a little curiously as well as with sympathy, for he continued to hold her hands and regard her eyes after he had spoken. He saw them fill slowly with tears, saw her shake her head to and fro, then, the tears being too slight to fall, she remained so, looking back at him while over her face spread that faint look of puzzle which had caught him at first sight of her. It made her blink her wet lashes and pout a little, but it went no further.

He left her with the sister, standing biting a bit of the carpet wool with knitted brows, whilst her companion rolled up the tags and bits of work, preparatory to freeing her from all tasks at such a solemn time. He felt almost certain, however that she did not think it was a solemn time. As he shut the door he heard her say—

“Where on earth shall I get a bit of mourning to wear? There’s only my black blouse, but the skirt’s grey, and my hat’s violet. That’s the worst of respect—it does cost money.”

What a creature! Terry Alders was right, a marionette, a marionette. A thing worked by the clockwork of its imitativeness, capable to some extent of doing what it was taught, but calmly, without aspiration, with-

out struggle, without desire beyond its own immediate wants and vanities. And yet he remembered those dirty bits of paper in Maggie Higglers hand. They must represent something, as the knitted puzzled brow must represent something, as the transcendent art of the dancing must.

So Nelly went to the funeral at Abney Park Cemetery attired in a black frock bought for her by his own money. He had asked the wife of one of the assistant clergy to give her kindly assistance in choosing it, and the result was that a St. Paul's Churchyard clad young person, appearing taller than she had hitherto done, went in state to the solemn orgies of Cat and Mutton Alley, carrying a wreath of violets in her hand.

He saw her go, as she had to pass his study window, walking very erect, as the occasion demanded, and indeed rather obviously acting a young lady at a funeral. He smiled to himself as he noticed the stately air and manner of sumptuous melancholy, the picturesque supporting by both hands of the violet wreath with its trailing ribbon of the same colour, bought out of her own trifling earnings.

But the wish in him grew to a passion that this helpless thing should rise out of the evil into which it had fallen, by its own right to immortal strength.

When sometimes from his study window he caught a glimpse of a laughing face flying past to the six o'clock lesson, wet and sparkling under an umbrella in the lash of the spring wind and rain, or absorbed and enthusiastic singing over a stave of something learnt with intent brow, but always unconscious of anyone watching, he thought he could see the dawn of the thing he sought. Or was it only the working mind, rising to Terry's masterly teaching?

Well, that was a weapon against the enemy, if not the weapon of Michael the Archangel, a strong and sturdy thing.



But at nights in the Cordwayners' chapel the brothers noticed the Master Cordwayner's strong, nervous, sinewy hands sometimes cling, brown and eager, a second or two longer over the altar lace, his bowed head prone between his knees after the benediction, under the flicker of candle-light. They did not know that this was a passionate extra petition for a soul, a soul to be born to a thing that the evil lust of men had crushed out of its right to birth.

Here in the silence, in the gutter of candles and the odour of stale incense, he fought out the battle against the men of whom his kinsman Nigel Finroy was a type, the war of the seraphim against the hideous army of levity and sensualism and self. Beat it out, struggled it out in the bloody warfare of prayer. He had got into grips with Nigel over this, and though Nigel knew nothing and cared less of what went on here, he fought him, nevertheless, as only men fight who have the legions of the unseen at their call and order. And he meant to triumph.

## CHAPTER X

"Become now self-acquainters,  
And paint man, man—whatever the issue!  
Make hopes shine through the flesh they fray!  
New fears aggrandise the rags and tatters,  
So bring the invisible full into play,  
Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?"

BROWNING.

A CERTAIN picture by a certain Mr. Porson was centralizing itself at a show at the New Gallery. People talked of nothing else except their own smart illnesses and each other's furs and scandals. And the picture by the otherwise unknown Mr. Porson suggested so many of the latter, and set in train such a volley of surmise, that it had captured the public

entirely, to the indignation of the real artists, and the almost death by breathless superciliousness of the artistic clique, which is rather another matter.

Everybody wore lumpy, prehistoric jewellery in honour of the occasion, even the otherwise dainty, as you must be picturesque at a picture-show, and the scent and the stuffiness and the noise were overwhelming. People trod on each other's frocks to get to Mr. Porson's picture in the long room, but Mrs. Alec Cates, strange to say, was not in the thick of this crush, but stood fluttering by a large picture, talking to the head of the outraged artistic clique, namely, Brother Jalfin's "Ipecacuanah," of the sliding hat and ideals.

"So lovely!" murmured Mrs. Cates, eagerly fanning herself and looking rapturously at the picture with all but her eyes, which shot about from side to side very busily over the fan-top. It is quite possible for such a woman to look rapturous in her attitude, her manner, and even her hat, and yet to keep her eyes briskly free for criticism.

"You really do feel it?" said the artist.

"I feel it most intensely," said Mrs. Cates, who certainly did not see it, fanning vigorously and studying the smart crowd with a growing eagerness of eye.

"It is an aspect of dear Scholasticah. Just an aspect," said the artist, sighing as she rolled her eyes to its splendours.

"Just," said Mrs. Cates cheerfully.

"She has so many," said the painter, and her hat slid back with a flop of emotion.

"Dozens," said Mrs. Cates, her eyes on the far door that opens into the gallery lounge, and vaguely recollecting that the varying degrees of these had caused her to write down the words "doubtful and tiresome" against that very lady's name on her own dinner invitation list.

The portrait of Scholastica was certainly more

impressionistic than becoming. It was the kind of portrait that made you long to be a provincial mayoress in a yellow satin frock, shoehorned on to you, with fringe-netted hair and fat diamonds. It drove anyone to that. It was so intense.

Reddish finger-joints and an angular clavicle starting out of a cloud of mole-coloured chiffon, completed by a grin of agony, three green poppies, and a blink. Otherwise poor Scholastica appeared to be a maze of nebulousity, which was partly her clothes, and partly her hair, and partly a feathery background against which she was made to yearn speechlessly.

But the eyes of Mrs. Cates were yearning for but one sight—a particular set of chinchillas. Suddenly the silvery beauties of these, set off by violets, dawned on her longing gaze, and everything else was forgotten.

“Lady Phillipa!” she ejaculated.

“Did you come here to look at her?” said Ipecacuanah rather sourly.

“I intended to see her if I could, of course,” said Mrs. Cates cautiously, not knowing yet whether she was forgiven. “Mr. Porson’s picture made such a good opportunity.”

“I should have thought that would have kept her away,” said Ipecacuanah, jerking her hat again on to a level with her head.

“But that is why she has come,” said Mrs. Cates, still watching the progress of the chinchillas through the crush. “When people think you won’t come they know you will come,” she added lucidly. “You see, she knew they thought she wouldn’t, so she would. Even I guessed that would be so.”

Poor Ipecacuanah, who worshipped at the shrine of untrammelled “Natchah,” here became puzzled and reflective, and put her chin to her hand so often that her hat’s pace up and down her head increased to that of a miniature switchback.

But Mrs. Cates basely deserted the "aspect of Scholastica," and followed Lady Phillippa, dogging her from picture to picture, till the great stage in the drama which all the crowd expected was reached. At the far end of the long room to the right of the entrance was a full-length picture—Mr. Porson's—named simply in the catalogue "Portrait of a Gentleman."

He wore either the dress of a dandy of Lord Melbourne's prime and day, or else modern mourning garments—the thing was so deep in its own shadows, and so cleverly managed as to the effacement of betraying detail, that it was hard to say quite which. One hand was hidden in the full breast of the coat as in the old grandiloquent fashion, and the model, being a fair man, confused of complexion, with a frown and a *retroussé* nose, the assumption that it was intended for William Pitt easily passed muster.

But there were three difficulties to this—the height, which was wrong, Pitt being a tall man and this a glorified middle height; the weakness of the mouth and the hysterical puff of the upper lip; and last of all an eyeglass held out in the right hand, which upon very close inspection turned out to be, not an eyeglass, but an oval miniature case, in which—and here came the point—was the head of a woman, *turned away*.

The whole thing was theatrical and nonsensical to a degree. It was the sort of thing Byron would have rejoiced in. Even the colour of the woman's hair was carefully slurred by the general shadows of the picture, and it took actually a magnifying glass to see its outline and character with any certainty or clearness—just a beautiful averted head, easily convertible to that of any woman.

But it was, of course, the very thing for such a crowd's delight. The name of Sir Nigel Finroy was being bandied about and the Pitt story used as a blind.



It was well known he affected to copy Pitt, and the head of the woman turned away fixed this guess under the circumstances into a lively possibility of a problem of the sort adored by such a crowd. Was it Sir Nigel? And who was the woman?

Lady Phillippa was not long enough over the side pictures to give her enemies and audience a chance to say that she knew it was there. She hit off her pauses to a nicety, came up easily, stood in front of the portrait, fair and square; surveyed it critically through her glass, read the name carelessly and referred lightly to her programme, and passed on her lofty unconcerned way.

And yet every paper had rung with innuendoes as to the identity of this very work—this was the second day of the view—and Mrs. Cates's "They thought she wouldn't, so she would," was the real truth about her in its relation.

She did it wonderfully and she won in the silent battle of wits, but nevertheless her hands were trembling with anger, and she was almost choking to get out of the sneering, staring place. The moment was Mrs. Cates's own.

"Lady Phillippa Finroy, have you seen the new Japanese pictures? How do you do? Mrs. Cates, don't you remember? You must pardon me, but we have met in a way. The dear Princess——"

"Oh, yes," said Phillippa. "I do remember. The Princess Max's prints. How d'ye do? What pictures?"

She smiled very brilliantly at Mrs. Cates, because the crowd was watching her every lip motion to trace the surmises of its bestial curiosity there, and she knew it as well as if it had challenged her.

"In the little water-colour corner of the lounge!" said the fawning lady delightedly. "May I show them to you? Everyone knows how perfectly marvellous

you are about all things Japanese ! So wonderful ! So clever ! ”

In the hour of her triumph the little lady echoed the Princess's own words mechanically, and with a sort of inward shrug Phillippa followed her eager little furred and feathered figure through the long room and out into the comparative cool of the lounge, in sheer weariness and shock.

The impudence of it ! That he should dare to have a woman's head put there, turned away ! Whether it was intended for herself or not, the insult remained the same, the sickening impertinence and publicity of it.

If there was any way by which she could even now injure and hurt him—her rings digging into her tightly wrung hands under her big muff kept her from uttering a sound beyond the polite remarks required of her over the water-colours. Fury had turned her momentarily cold, and she was hardly even aware of the chatter of Mrs. Cates, which went prattling on at her ear, until suddenly a sentence or two struck her as having possibilities.

“ So clever of you ! I do so love to be taught all about these things by clever people who know. My poor part in the world of intellect is to collect the brilliant people, dear Lady Phillippa, get them round me, and admire them. I could do that for ever and ever, only one knows how dreadful genius is about keeping engagements. I have quite a crowd of friends here to-day—so artistic ! We give little musical reunions at Cambridge Square (she meant jammed crushes of very cross people). So pleasant to hear one's gifted friends perform so wonderfully, and all mentioned so nicely by the Press in the smart party news ! Could I hope—wouldn't you—have you ever time ? ” etc., etc., etc.

“ I go out so very little,” said Phillippa, turning her cold, red-coloured eyes to the pleading ones of Mrs.

Cates. "But perhaps one day—yes, I will try. You are very kind. By the by, do you ever want to hear of new performing people? I have heard of—I know something—of a rather extraordinarily gifted creature."

"Oh, dear Lady Phillippa, of course I do. Someone you know? Anyone who——"

"Who she is remains a mystery," said Phillippa, her slow, distant accents fraught with meaning. "And must remain one. But she is being taught by a friend of mine, and I can assure you that he is a person who has a genius for discovering genius."

Mrs. Cates was overjoyed at this mark of confidence and friendship. That she might be allowed to serve Lady Phillippa, who in her turn was a friend of the Princess! How fortunate that she had made such a clever guess about the Porson picture and so secured this wonderful task!

But Phillippa went back to the house in Little Wilton Street laughing bitterly to herself. She would soon be glad of such friends as this ignorant, cheerfully ill-bred little plutocrat. The servant handed her some cards left by callers in her absence. They were one and all from people with doubtful histories, women of demi-reputation, smirched this way and that, and one from a woman, certainly of as good birth as her own, but openly suspected of blackmail as a little home profession. She threw them down angrily.

"Wretched ghouls!" she said. "Because I could not live with evil myself, I am henceforth to be ranked with the shunned and the shady! It is not a law that makes the innocent suffer with the guilty—it is a mockery. I will not rank myself with those women! At least I can keep away from everybody, shut myself up like a penitent for a crime I have not committed."

She threw the cards into the fire, and tried to forget the significance of the incident. She went out and dined by invitation with some old friends at a

restaurant, a theatre dinner, and laughed and talked very loudly and very bitterly. These very friends had always hitherto asked her to their house. Now they could not, for reasons patent. They could not reckon on who would resent meeting her.

After the play she came home again and stood before the low fire in her own special little boudoir-sanctum, leaning her head on her hand and looking long into its ashy depths.

It was a quaint room, small, and crowded with trophies of the East, queer metallic figures, and dim-toned worked panels of curious symbolism.

In one corner was a deep niche, painted a deep Moorish blue, containing an ivory figure of Lao Tzu with a silver lamp burning before it; and in another the strange face of a Mahatma, life-size, in inlaid metals, gleamed from the shadows with a weird effect of quasi-life.

A low carved bookshelf was filled with precious little volumes of Eastern lore, the nullifying philosophies and delicately perfected despairs that charm the rebel passions into forgetfulness of conscience. This was her inmost shrine.

"The man is already half forgiven," she said dully to herself. "It is only we who suffer shame—the rest of us, who mostly are not to blame. Already the world is taking him back. He has dared it and laughed back at it, and, for a man, that is enough. That picture is a popular trick, but it is clever, and will get him supporters, as the world wags to-day! It is the question in it that will appeal!"

She moved suddenly to a winged wall-mirror, and taking a hand-glass in her hand studied the effect of her own head and neck turned away. Her restaurant dinner dress had a plain fichu arrangement which brought out the exquisite curve of her shoulder, making it almost identical with that of the pictured



woman in the miniature, and the slender turn of her neck was the same. But she thought that the outline of her cheek was a smoother oval, even when averted, than that of the picture. As she recollected it, and she did recollect it very distinctly for all her acted indifference, the face had shown a sharper definition of cheek-bone and a more clearly defined point of chin than hers.

The colour of the hair had told her nothing. Her own sweep of bronze locks shaded to dark, almost crimsony browns, or burnt to red-golds in different effects of light, and the picture had been very dark, and the woman's hair in deep shadow. She remembered Maudie Bathshaw's blatant henna dye and laughed shortly. By no stretch of imagination could such a flaming colour ever tone itself to deep chestnut, as in the portrait, even by an artist's flattery.

Suddenly she laid down the hand-glass and reflected deeply. There was another possibility.

Ugh! Why did she care? Did she not hate him as bitterly as any man could be hated? Then why?

She did not realize that hurt vanity may be an agony as great in its way as a broken heart. She did not realize that she was suffering a feverish martyrdom from that alone. Like most of us, she was fully convinced of the lofty nature of her own sufferings. That they could be infinitely mean she never dreamed.

Her gods here failed her desperately. The Fatalism that she loved had nothing to offer in such a crisis, though hitherto it had helped her to bear social insult and degradation in a stately silence. All the philosophies that she clung to were based on the assumption of the clear righteousness of the disciple. Not one stooped to his sin and weakness.

The beautiful ivory Lao Tzu, on his white antelope, glimmered in his shaded blue niche and seemed to tremble, delicate and half opaque in the flickering light

of the little silver lamp swaying before him, yet of all the grand, vague sayings of that holy Chinaman there was nothing to apply to the tumult of an angry woman's heart. A little carved Buddha on a pedestal behind her held up its beautiful, strange, still face, full of futurity and selflessness, but brought no tangible force in its hand to combat the raging of a miserable soul. All her splendid sages, her quaintly pictured Zoroaster, her dreamy Mahomet, her grave Confucius, her great and noble men of old time counselled a dim and beautifully soporific resignation, preferably witty in expression, demoniacally cruel. Vast negations to a wild heart furious for action, to wild, hot blood racing to be doing. Stones for bread.

Suddenly she rose out of her musings and went to a little inlaid desk and wrote a note to Terry Alders, a trifle bantering in tone.

"How does 'La Nellguin,' as de Gramont called the little person's prototype?" she asked in it. "Is her polite education finished? I can give you an introduction to a champion big-game hunter, who is dying to do all the work of impresario for nothing, if you wish, and who could dance a person of average talent into the big arena of moneyed noodleism which the Unionist papers believe to be society. And, after all, that is all that counts, isn't it? Tell me when you wish a word spoken."

After she had written it and sent it off she wished that she had added another thing, that she meant to come and see for herself.

## CHAPTER XI

"My God, what is a heart,  
That Thou dost eye it so and woo,  
Pouring upon it all Thy art,  
As if Thou hadst nought else to do."

GEORGE HERBERT.

THE door flew open, there was a flash of white, a whirl of black, and against it leaned a slim, soft shape, panting hard, and flashing angry bright eyes out of a tangled sweep of hair.

"I protest, myself!" it said violently. "Do people only belong to churches to forbid other people to do things? In a hat like a cruiser, and feet like railway signals turned upside down, and the nose of a battering-ram. To be allowed to interfere with me! Is it fair?"

Two Brothers, tall Dan Larnaker, priest, and little Barney Jalfin, master of acolytes and lay sacristan, stood side by side gazing in astonishment.

The whirled entrance of the breathless thing, which they now perceived to be a girl, had broken all their records and was dead against all their rules. This was supposed to be sacred ground. How dare she enter upon it? Astonishment robbed them of speech.

It was a spring evening, in the early chill of the season. The harsh silver-gold rays of its fading sunshine pierced through the sombreness of a high-placed leaded window in the stone wall, slanted down sharply, and then caught the burning warmth of beaten copper, the blue gleaming of enamel mosaics, and the geranium glow of a panel of St. Charles Borromeo in his cardinal's dress. Otherwise mellow brown shadows, and the innumerable blacks of carved wood figures, the metallic deeps of bronze lamps, the dim purples of church

hangings disposed about the place made it seem as mysterious as an Aladdin's cave. Here also the treasure, such as it was, was as carelessly heaped, and very little floor space was left for the standing of the mere human, much less the upsetting female.

There were two doors to the shop: one the business door, opening into Litany Lane in the heart of the City's rush; the other, at the back, through a passage into the classrooms of the school-house.

By the latter entrance no one not a vowed Cordwayner had ever so much as dared to enter the sacred shop of images, yet now the record was broken by a girl! And that a talking one! For it was the little East Ender, though they hardly knew her for the same. Nelly, the penitent, in the new dignity of a black dress, quite long, and very high at the throat, seemed taller, paler, and more commanding than the half-child that they had seen occasionally about the place for three months now, in charge of the sisters and school-mistresses. Nelly, the penitent, in a temper was newer still. A funny little sly, imitative monkey everybody knew she was, whose peaked-up chin and rather puzzled expression struck her face out clear in the memory, showing out from the blurred commonplaceness of faces of workers and school-children and guild girls at various meetings and weeknight services. But that was all. But here you had an angry young lady, demanding redress for something mysterious, and that in heat and hurry.

"Well, whose hat? What nose?" at last said Dan Larnaker slowly.

"Interfering what with?" said Jalfin.

"Me. When I learn to dance and do imitations with Mr. Alders," she replied. "Out there, back in the schoolroom. Dreadfully awkward it is, you know, Brothers. In a forest of forms and ink-pots. Not a B flat to the piano, and a floor like a nutmeg-grater! But



I do Nelly Gwynne crying oranges, and French beggars on the pier, and Mrs. Maud Bathshaw scolding you, and a coster selling rabbit-skins, and Sister, and Laura on the kerb, and you, and Brother Stephen, and you——” nodding at Brother Jalfin, “and Mr. Majorson——”

“What?” said Larnaker. “Do us?”

“Yes. Act you, I mean. It’s quite easy, and nobody minds. I do Mr. Alders, and he doesn’t mind. He only laughs. I do everyone as animals or birds, with the proper noises thrown in. Sort of parlour tricks, you know.”

“Cool tricks,” said Larnaker, surveying the black-clad young lady with his arms akimbo, from his lanky height. “Did Alders teach them to you?”

“Oh no. I invented them all. He only made up the tunes to go with them.”

“Tunes—how?”

“Oh, you see I dance while I imitate. The dance has to be made up to suit the person’s whole style. For instance, *you* I do with a very long skip and a jump with my head going first—don’t you see? I do you as a kangaroo. It’s rather new.”

“I hope it is, really,” said the amazed Dan, rubbing his chin. His long stride, with a sort of jump in it, was not without fame, and what Nelly called his “head going first” was a curious habit he had of butting his rather pear-shaped head, as though to propel himself along faster. It was a trait he had heard of before from his fellow Cordwayners, but the fact that it was now being done to music by a grown-up and rather graceful person in a black frock, with a wave of soft hair above two brilliant troublous eyes, made all the difference.

“Does Mr. Majorson know how you act—all of us?” he asked.

“No, but you see he’ll know now. That’s just it. You see the cat is going to tell him—that is why I have run

here. I was so furious, I couldn't stay. I was so ashamed of such a scene in front of the beautiful lady."

Brother Jalfin rammed his thumbs into his cassock cord and peeped up under his bushy brows.

"You are more incoherent than even your sex demands," he said tritely. "Let us disentangle all this. Now tell us first who is the—grimalkin?"

"Can't you guess, Brother?" She laughed with despairing brows and shook her head.

"Suppose I can. And who then is the beautiful lady?"

"Oh, someone quite splendid, a real lady, a friend of Brother Terry's, who came rustling in, dressed beautifully, and wanted to see me act and sing. She spoke sweetly to us all, and was so nice, and sat next to Sister Kate, who always comes to the lessons and knits. When suddenly there was a raid—without any warning—three of them! I've left them all fighting it out!"

Brother Jalfin rubbed his chin and looked round. "That's interesting." I'd lock the door to keep them out of here, but you being here makes that improper. And I can't turn you out into the street by the outer door, you black witch, or I might incur the wrath of the police-station. I suppose your chaperon, Sister Kate, will be coming after you shortly? It's devoutly to be hoped so."

"I suppose she will. They're all talking hard. But Sister doesn't care. She's just doing like this." She sat down promptly on an oak stool that she pulled out from the side, took an attitude and cast her eyes down upon some imaginary knitting at which she pretended to work busily, pursed up her lips, and peeped out of the corner of her eyes several times; shook her head, and then, twinkling all over indescribably, said, "Brother Terry, do you think you *ought*? That's a dove," she added, by way of explanation.

Larnaker wheeled round on his heel and sat down suddenly on a table, his hands in his cassock pockets, and chuckled. The imitation was exact. Sister Kate's

voice was a kind of high-pitched contralto, and Nelly got its seductive roundnesses to perfection, intermingling it with the cooing of a dove. But Brother Jalfin remained facing her, folding his arms, and peeping sternly under the bush of his brows.

"Go on then. Do the lot. You may as well, now," he said gruffly, and Nelly proceeded to obey, here and there emphasizing her imitations by a trifling dance or quaint walk, and getting through the performance at a rapid pace, to the subdued titters of the audience. She had just got to the very middle of Brother Jalfin, and was making him hop like a little bird across the shop floor, saying testily, "Renaissance? Renaissance? Give me the old masters, the deep, theological, serious Calvinistic old Catholic masters—chip! chip!"—for he was taken off as a sparrow—when a curious thing happened. The door behind her opened sharply at the same moment that the shop door was also flung open wide.

From the schoolroom door came Terry Alders and a group of ladies, and from the street door entered Mr. Majorson, alone. Terry hurried forward, escorting an imposing figure in chinchillas, whose face was set in cold mockery towards the street door, when they came up full in front of the vicar. He stared at her uncomprehendingly.

"Lady Phillipa!" he said, amazed.

"Yes, Mr. Majorson." Her eyes wavered a little, but the mockery clung round her lips incurably. "I am just going. I was interested in Mr. Alders' pupil, and came to see her dance. Charming. Quite a future!"

He bowed gravely. He was too indignantly surprised to speak. Surely she, of all women, ought not to have come here? Was it possible she did not know anything of the girl's identity? Her expression told another story. He was silent in angry wonder.

She held out her hand to him: "Good-bye. I have been more than amused," she said, her voice shaking

with some emotion, possibly laughter, or was it anger? "All this is so pristine and innocent. You monks, you monks!"

He did not answer, and Terry hurried her out to her carriage, even that cavalier, for once in his life, a little irritated by her manner. Was she, the divinity, growing hard and vulgar? When she put out a white-gloved hand to him she repeated her exclamation, "You monks!" and he, like Majorson, turned away in silent irritation. He wished she had not come. It was bad taste, at best.

But back in the shop he forgot everything, for he heard a voice like unto the sound of the Dungeness pier drum when the French fruit-boats get befogged.

"This is a timely encounter, Vicar!" it thundered.

"Very fortunate, very fortunate," babbled a silly falsetto in its wake.

"We really ought to explain, Vicar," said a third female voice, breathless with timidity, and stopped short.

"Pray do so, then," said Mr. Majorson, standing square in front of the little crowd of ladies, his hands behind him. "What is the matter?" The Sister said nothing, but sidled up to Nelly, and there the two stood at meek attention. One gazed on the ground demurely and one up at the ceiling defiantly. Otherwise they appeared to be quite detached and uninterested in the whole affair.

But Mr. Larnaker climbed down from his table seat and murmured an explanation to his chief. A fresh attack interrupted him.

"It is my duty as a Churchwoman, Mr. Majorson," said the fog-horn lady, now getting herself forward in the little crowd by means of paddling her elbows with the movement of propelling a Canadian canoe, "to protest, finally, against the quite extraordinary affairs, called, I think, *music* lessons, that go on here without—I sincerely *hope* without—your knowledge!"



The hope seemed to be a forlorn one from the tone. For a second the Vicar stared at her with sheer human, man-like horror at her own personality and appearance, irrespective of her office as a deputation. She was the grand-niece of a long-dead Colonial Bishop, whose mantle of episcopal authority she was confident had fallen upon herself. She was a hard worker, and she was so strenuous that she was barely recognizable as a woman at all. She bristled with principles from boat-shaped felt hat to flat goloshes. Principles came out at her elbows and made them stick into the passers-by; they resounded in the awful tread of her heel down a church aisle; they made her nose trumpet-shaped, her eyes ferocious, her knuckles bumpy, and her back a fearful length. To hear her turn a door-handle would make the average person scream, but to hear her on Church theology would make angels weep. She was the terror of congresses and the nightmare of temperance societies, and she was so used to fighting bishops that she made war on mere vicars as readily as she would rap little boys' knuckles at treats. Everyone said she was a woman of ability and everyone ran violently in the opposite direction when they saw her coming. Her reputation was immense.

Mr. Majorson only bowed to her in reply and turned to another lady, saying—

"What is the trouble, Mrs. Mears?"

"Really, actually, rather a misunderstanding, Vicar," this one replied nervously. "Only about Elinor Lovekyn's recitation lessons. Miss Frubbert and Miss Finny happened to overhear some of these and did not—did not—quite like the tone."

Terry's hands were deep in his pockets, and he was whistling Gounod's "Funeral March of a Marionette," under his breath.

"Don't," said Nelly aside, her eyes still on the ceiling. "If you do I shall dance it."

"How did Miss Finny and Miss Frubbert come to hear them?" said Majorson, still addressing Mrs. Mears rather pointedly.

"They—they came in to see me," she answered.

"And you, had you duties in the little inner school-room?" His tone was bland, but Mrs. Mears blushed painfully.

"I—I went in just a moment, to speak to Sister Kate about the Clothing Club," she replied.

He nodded. He did not want to be hard on her. She was the wife of one of his curates—the only married one—and the post had broken her spirit even more terribly than it usually does. All the indescribable impertinences of a class of curious ladies who attach themselves to a bachelor priest's church as "workers" fell to her unhappy share. She was the butt in a circle round an unmarried vicar. She had to appear in so many capacities as first lady and yet not as first lady, that she was gradually becoming a bundle of shilly-shallyings, apologies, and nerves, which would eventually crystallize into chronic temper.

Miss Frubbert cleared her throat like a seal barking. She always blew this preliminary trumpet when she was especially on the warpath.

"Mr. Majorson," she said, elbowing all her neighbours in her excitement and barking again, "this affair has reached a crisis. There is no longer any doubt that the girl Lovekyn must enter our Rescue Home at once. I have urged it upon the Committee, and I shall insist upon its being done after this. She must be taken into our laundry and trained into shape. It is *my* work to see to the reforming of such young women in the proper and regular manner. The present arrangement is out of the question, out of the question! It is highly improper that Lovekyn should dance and act in front of an audience of flashy women"—Majorson stared—"I mean a flashy woman, such as I encountered

there to-day," corrected Miss Frubbert. Even she was unable to put the adjective to sad Mrs. Mears or poor little Sister Kate, "and that she should have lessons from a perfectly unknown layman of, I must say, great personal levity! Mr.—er—er—er—Malders is, I should say, hardly a fit and proper person to train the young."

"Hardly," murmured Terry. "I see I need taking in hand myself. Madam, won't you——"

"Thanks, Miss Frubbert, but the matter is in my hands," Mr. Majorson replied with a kind of curt blandness. "Mr. Alders is fully competent. Lady Phillippa, the lady you saw there to-day, is a relative of my own, by marriage." He paused a second, to disentangle this statement in his own mind. "Now I have a question to ask you. How did you know Mrs. Mears was in my schoolroom speaking to Sister Kate, who was there to look after Elinor?"

"That is of no consequence."

"I want to know."

"Miss Finny was fully informed of it."

Mr. Majorson turned to the parish jackal, wondering what she was not fully informed of. She was a little woolly, beady-eyed person, with a twittering voice, who hunted round for scandalous morsels to keep her fierce chief, Miss Frubbert, satisfied. She now lisped out a shockingly weak excuse, and tittered. A baby manner at forty-nine seemed to her to cover all the little crimes of trickery and feeble scheming that she daily committed in the name of parochial labours.

"Thanks. Now I will say good-bye to all of you," he said with hard amiability, and opening the door. "We have done, I think. Good-bye, ladies."

But Miss Frubbert made a last stand for victory. "I shall insist on the lessons being stopped!" she cried. "It is beyond all sense or reason. I shall write to the Rural Dean about it. A girl who ought to be scrubbing floors to be taught to sing and dance!"

"Please write to the Rural Dean," he said wearily. "And hear his ideas on scrubbing floors versus pirouettes. They ought to be interesting. Problem—whether it is more elevating to perform on floors with your hands or with your feet!"

"Really," roared Miss Frubbert; but Brother Jalfin, who had lifted an oak box as if to carry it out of the way, suddenly let it fall against the half-open door in which the lady stood, shutting it violently and ejecting the last protesting golosh from the step. The shadow of her nose loomed across the blind as she posted off to the unhappy Rural Dean.

"That's what comes of letting women come into a place," Jalfin ejaculated breathlessly, propping his back against the wooden portal, in case the demagogue should try to force a re-entrance. "All this is due to one girl! One girl! All the bother of the world was made by one girl, and they've been at it ever since! I would take a broom to 'em myself!"

Majorson sent Nelly off with her beloved Sister, and asked Terry to come and talk it over, with a despairing laugh.

Nevertheless he was distinctly annoyed, and thought the Brother had been a little careless. He did not intend to give in to Frubbert's interference, but contemplated a suspension of the lessons for a time, at all events, if only for Elinor's own discipline.

But Lent, with its momentary solution of the difficulty, was now upon them. When the leaf-buds on the blackened lilac bushes behind the priest's house bent their heads to the lash of spring rain and blizzard, and the deep chant of Passion hymns sent their rich, minor echoes across the courtyard of nights, the little lady was ordered to cease to dance and sing for a time. She gave in to the decree rather willingly, more willingly than the man who watched her slow growth of heart and mind could have dreamed she would do. It sur-



prised and touched him. The sudden meekness had a charm of its own. But it was a bit of a mystery. He watched her more closely than he quite knew himself.

She now came to the frequent Lenten services with something that was either obedience or devotion. Something that gave a softer puzzle to her puzzled face, and rounded and perfected her features into a wan, flower-like beauty. She would follow the Stations of the Cross with a slow dreaminess, and lean longer over her kneeler chair when the services had finished, and the last echo of departing footsteps had struck on the stone, looking with a curious vacancy into mid-air. She spoke less and laughed more rarely. There seemed to be a spell growing upon her. Was she realizing her own tragedy at this late hour? But why?

As the weeks wore on it worried him a little. It seemed altogether too serious and sudden a change to be natural. He decided to speak to the kindly, if worried, Mrs. Mears about her. And his petitions for her grew every night more broodingly strong, more mightily enclosing. Yet he got no hint of the riddle's answer.

Then one day there came a messenger of the truth. He had about that time a big mid-Lent night service at which he was to preach. The great dim church was crowded with the widely gathered strays of a City congregation. From the pulpit, as he rose into it, a familiar face took his attention in all the sea of faces. It looked like Maggie Higgler's, and yet to his unlearned masculine eye there was something changed about it. A vast, upstanding hat surmounted it, whose sweeping coloured feather made a strongly defined piece of finery in a blur of shoddiness. Under its right shadow lay a little fair, fluff-bald baby in Maggie's arms, and beneath the shade of its left wing a small blue-chinned, thick-set man sat twisting a cap round and round incessantly in both hands; very clearly Mr. Higgler.

They sat in a pew near the back, and all looked profoundly solemn. It occurred to Majorson to wonder why they were here at all, but he was of necessity obliged to concentrate on what he was saying, and so forgot their presence, more or less.

After the service Jalfin looked into the clergy vestry, where Majorson remained alone after the other priests had gone, and asked if a Mrs. Higgler might speak to him. Maggie and family were duly ushered in. She took the seat opposite to his own as indicated, but turned it a little sideways to him, as though almost involuntarily avoiding his direct gaze.

This was unlike her usual majestic frankness, and it caught his attention at once. She was looking very handsome, and was very slightly flushed, but was it the flush and the stars of light in her eyes that made the difference? Suddenly even he—not only a man but an ecclesiastic—grasped the reason—the metal pins were gone. Before him, in full splendour, shone Maggy's annual fringe!

She had actually begun to state her errand, and yet the fact still bewildered him. Roll upon roll of tightly curled hair covered the upper part and sides of her fine head. It was not fluffy, nothing so frivolous. On the contrary, each curl was as separate, as glossy-clear in outline as the globules of fruit which form a bunch of grapes, and through having lain so long in strict preparation—probably since the August Bank Holiday—the rounded ringlets clung close to the shape of her brow with an almost classic regularity, as the same sort of fringe is worn by the Greek statues of Cassandra, the finished and conventionalized form of a frivolity. It was a magnificent sight.

"It was about Nelly Lovekyn I came," said Mrs. Higgler, a little sternly. "Something—private—I wanted to say to you."

Majorson glanced up at Mr. Higgler, who would not

sit down, but had persisted in standing some paces away behind his wife, still busily twirling his pearl-buttoned cap, his brow beaded with a fever of shyness.

"Oh, he's only Mine," said Maggie, nodding backwards proudly, and using the possessive, as was her custom, as a sort of familiar name. "I brought him on purpose. What I have to say requires that you should see for yourself that I am proper married, and have the right to speak. So there he stands. I have two sons—this is my youngest."

She indicated her big, fair baby, now sleeping peacefully with his delicate lips parted in breathing.

"A fine boy! How old is he?"

"He was born with the first vi'lets—them from France, I mean."

"Fruppence—re-gross," put in Mr. Higgler from the vestry shadows, in a raucous guttural hardly recognizable as a voice, and not looking in the direction of either of his listeners.

"That makes him two months old," said Maggie.

"He's a splendid chap," said Majorson.

"My other's just as fine; two years ago he came, just when they was hawking red roses on the kerb."

"Toid — up—'n—the—bunch—tuppence—to—the—lydies," said Mr. Higgler. "After nine—o'clock—'oip'ny!" The last word came out as though shot out of a tube.

"But what have you to tell me about Nelly?" asked Majorson, deeply interested.

"Something I'm sorry to say, yet, sir, somehow glad to say, though I shouldn't be, I know. Something that I think you none of you guess here—you being monks and nuns, as the saying is, and so p'raps a little——"

"Sawney," put in Mr. Higgler, in a perspiration of embarrassment, but determined to help.

"What is it?" His voice was low.

"Haven't you noticed her not well lately? Thoughtful? Not so gay like?"

"I have, yes."

"Didn't you think——" She paused suddenly and stooped over her baby and put her lips to its pure, sleeping face, letting them rest there, a blush suffusing her half-averted cheek, silent and downcast. Then she turned her face slowly round to him, still with her head resting on the cheek of her sleeping child, and looked at him solemnly, all the pontifical majesty of motherhood in her eyes. She did not know it, but she sat exactly in the attitude of Raphael's Sistine Madonna, the embracing mother curled round her little one, forming a divine circle of love.

"Sir," she said gravely, "look at me now, here with my son that God gave me to love and to keep. . . . Sir, little Nelly will be like me when you hear them singing lavender."

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

"Lady fair,  
I bring to you  
Lavender,  
Sweet spikes of blue,  
Such that grows  
With spicy scent  
In meadows  
In flowery Kent.

Won't you buy me sweet bloomin' lavendaire?  
Six sweet bunches for  
A penny."

Thus sang the Cockney street hawkers about the dusty streets to a lilting old Gregorian chant when August came that year. And in a long white hospital ward a dark-fluffed, dimple-fisted citizen came to London town to run a new tilt with the cruelty of the world.



## BOOK II

## CHAPTER XII

"If the beard were all, goats might preach."—DANISH PROVERB.

WHERE the River Medway makes a long silver line through the yellow salt-marshes of Kent, and the brown sails of barges mingle with the distant dream-chimneys of Chatham and Rochester, there stands a large chapel. The back part of it is built of yellow brick, but the front and a quarter of each side is faced with stucco and has a large tympanum and six simulated pillars, in a species of bas-relief. These alone save it from being mistaken for a railway goods warehouse. As this monstrosity stands alone and utterly unneighbouring by any other building for a quarter of a mile each way, it has the appearance of wearing a foolishly transparent mask with an air of imbecile solemnity. The eye that is caught by the drab stucco Corinthian frontage is also caught and held by the glare of the yellow brick, and the sham thus hits everyone in the face.

Sere hedge-parsley and the wild sea-celery of the salt marshes grow raggedly about its bricky base, and weed and stone surround it; but its front is covered and plastered half-way up to the round-topped windows with bills and posters whose wild legends are blurted forth in chocolate-colour and royal blue printing ink. These are bitter upbraidings at the Government—all Governments—for not immediately creating national virtue by legislation according to the special programme of this particular corner of the globe. Their tone is

always alarmist and threatening, and everybody and everything said to be going rapidly to perdition.

One spring evening, when the tardily setting sun struck with cold rays across the yellow waste of mere-grass, but the east wind bit and withered, this place was filled to overflowing with a huge political meeting, gracefully calling itself a temperance gathering. All the seats and the gallery were closely packed, mainly with men, and the incandescent gas globes had a hard fight to glare down the sinister yellow marsh-sunset that would persist in coming in at the railway-warehouse windows. The decorations were as usual—almost everything that could be was painted that liver-colour which is politely but untruly called chocolate ; that sign and symbol of a Calvinism which, being rooted and grounded in dyspepsia, naturally rears its own especial tint as a standard colour.

Various speakers had arisen, stormed, protested, nearly choked, and sat down again writhing in hysteria, all with variously original kinds of beards and whiskers ; that is to say, they were shaved in the wrong places and hirsuted in the wrong places. But now a huge clapping announced the arising and introduction of another speaker, the first to present a clean-shaven face to his audience.

The chairman announced : “ Sir Nigel Finroy ! ” and then uttered a few remarks about a new convert to our cause, rising young landowner, son of a noble father, winding up with something—mercifully rather indistinct—about Daniel, and social rottenness, and progress.

Nigel stood holding manfully on to his coat-lapels, which were silk-lined. His head was thrown back and he faced his audience with that blank stare of the eyes and puffing of the nostrils which some people call honesty and others impudence. Nothing could have been neater. His morning coat was tightly buttoned

up, and his tie was a funereal black edged with white, like an inverted funeral card, but his whole cut was indefinably smart, and distinguished him altogether from the curious broadcloths and splashes of shirt-front of his present companions.

"I just want to say, my friends," he plunged with boyish frankness, "how glad I am to be here amongst you, and to be welcomed into the ranks of social reform and the great movement of moral cleansing. I have no merits of my own [a frankly sweet smile and headshake]. I come to you on the memory of my noble father [cheers], Sir James Finroy, who, as everyone here is aware, spent his life in a great social endeavour and died in harness." [Here a manly gulp. Sir James Finroy had died of apoplexy because his son was not respectable; but everybody forgot this, and only remembered the young man's politics.] "I am your neighbour here," Nigel went on, referring to Cobdenmere, which was three miles away, "and I feel it to be one amongst my many new responsibilities that I should assist as far as I am able in the great causes and social movements of which my great father was so brilliant a leader. [Hear, hears.] I therefore present myself to you in this new capacity, and am ready to go forth in the name of freedom and fight the Drink Evil, which is the degradation of our beloved country. All the lions which beset our national path will I tackle to the teeth. Gladly, sirs, I take my stand against the Popery of the Church of England, and will do all in my power to crush the power of the priesthood, which is the menace of our Protestant civilization, and to fight with you and for you under the mighty banner of Social Reform."

There was plenty more in this strain for twenty-five minutes. It was a splendid example of how much you can say without saying anything at all. It was received with shouts of applause. Nigel sat down pant-

ing and tremulous. He had begun the speech determined to act the noble young reformer, and he sat down feeling that he was the noble young reformer. That was his especial genius. He had only to talk in the style of a particular character for five minutes to become convinced that he was that character. He really meant it when he roared out the words "power of the priesthood," having even now a vivid recollection of a City church on a certain October morning nearly two years and a half ago, and the personal feeling which thus quivered in his voice gave power to his feebly conventional rhetoric.

The audience hailed this tone with nods of grim approval. Lines of chin-whisker and gleaming spectacles and bald heads nodded up and down in assent. The whole scheme of their idealism, religious and political, consisted in protest. It was purely virulent and destructive, as opposed to all peace and construction, consequently they were delighted to discover a new disciple who was not only strong in the protesting line, but capable of inventing new things to protest against. This was their conception of a pioneer.

Other speakers came forward and variously worked themselves into froths in the name of their cause, cudgelling the audience with statistics rattled out in the high falsetto of hatred, and swearing violently in all but the words at all who disagreed with them, or who were dimly supposed to disagree with them.

They were all patted on the back by the chairman, who had sandy hair, parted down the middle, and a white cravat like a Dutch windmill, and a mouth which seemed to have been gathered inwards by tapes like the top of a bag. The two ends of his cravat gave one the impression of being the ends of the tapes, and one could almost imagine him pulling them to turn his smile on and off. He introduced these acrobats one by one in



mellifluous accents, with a social manner that was so near a sneer that it would seem to need the faith of the elect to stand it at all. But they took it for granted.

When at last the proceedings reached an effective tableau in a little bearded man, lost in a frenzied digression on the hidden alcohol in ginger-beer, bringing on a species of epileptic fit on the platform, Mr. Blagdon, the chairman, declared the meeting closed in triumph.

Finroy was surrounded and congratulated, introduced and patronized. One man alone out of all the crowd asked the chairman a quick question about his past, a sharp gleam in his little eyes.

"Has he not joined the great Cause?" was the solemn reply, accompanied by a cold stare of non-comprehension. Another man, with a black fringe of beard under a long, thin, livid face, put in—

"Has he joined the Blue Section, that's what I want to know? Outside the Blue Section all your righteousness is as filthy rags. *I am of the Blue Section.*"

This appeared to be quite true on the face of it, and did not require one so clearly in the blues to insist upon the fact.

"All the sections," the chairman replied cheerfully—one might have said sardonically—as though he were talking of honey. "He is to preside at every reunion, every gathering, every meeting on our coming propaganda." He waved his white pig's-trotter hands, with their pinky tips, comprehensively, and smiled palely round at his audience. "He will bring his power of wealth and worldly position into the fray. We need such recruits. We will storm the power of the rich and tear down the strongholds of Belial—yes, Mr. Simpson? Did you say hot supper? Yes, I can come after I have had a word or two with Sir Nigel."

"Mrs. Simpson told me to tell you," replied the man addressed, pursing up his mouth and screwing up his

eyes. "Hot grilled kidneys and pies and some of that trifle you liked so last time."

"Ah, the trifle, the trifle! Of course I'll come. Excellent stuff, excellent table, your wife's, Mr. Simpson. Such rich sauces—excellent!"

"Trifle?" put in the Blue Section man belligerently. "That's the same as what we used to call 'tipsy cake.' Plum bun soaked in brandy, that is!"

"I know nothing about that," said Mr. Blagdon blandly. "My glass holds pure water from the spring and no other. Are we babes to consider spoon-meat?"

"You were never a babe at all," muttered the Blue Section gentleman under his breath and retiring. "You came into this world as knowing as a yellow ferret, and will go out of it one better than the Evil One himself!"

With this severe judgment on his leader he shuffled into the crowd, which was now moving along and accompanying the hero of the hour to his motor.

With head thrown boyishly back and lighted eyes, Nigel was grasping all the hands of friendship as he passed out on his triumphal progress. He beckoned to Blagdon and asked him to ride part of the way with him, and as their destinations all lay in the direction of Cobdenmere, the maker of trifles was also included in the party and the three drove away into the night. The third man was put behind, but Finroy and Blagdon sat side by side for that "word" they both wanted.

"Look here," Finroy said hurriedly, directly they were well away on the road, "I don't deny that I expect you'll have a few questions—nasty questions—asked about me, eh?"

The windmill bow almost fluttered with the benevolence of the answering smile above it.

"My married life," Nigel went on, gathering courage, "was a sad affair, Mr. Blagdon." A pause; the first hint of a gulp. "What can I say? Can a fellow

injure a woman—give her away? As I say, I'll always stick by a woman. But Lady Phillippa was an aristocrat, and——" he shrugged under his motor-coat in the dark. "Perhaps she couldn't help heredity? You know, you may have heard what her father was—Lord Rackstock? Carried upstairs to bed every night by his butler, sir; turned out of one of the swell clubs for the same reason. Poor Phillippa—well, well, you know the race and tear of a society woman's life, Mr. Blagdon. You know the nervous depression that follows it all; and a woman is only a woman, but——"

Mr. Blagdon was gazing with distended eyes and shaking head, the tape in his thin lips pulling them into a tight bunch, as though he had tugged at the ends of the windmill. He put out his hand.

"Sir Nigel," he said earnestly, clutching the astrachan motor-glove with deep feeling, "was that the reason why—you broke off—the marriage?"

Nigel nodded. Feeling was supposed to have choked his utterance.

"Dreadful, dreadful!"

"But a secret—hardly a soul knows it," he put in.

"These secret forms are the worst."

"Yes, yes, indeed."

"How sad! Dear me! And a young lady?"

"Quite. Yes. So you see how I am placed? I can't give her away to the world now, can I? Still, if in the future you should be asked——" He paused.

"Sir Nigel, I understand *perfectly*," said the mellifluous Blagdon. And it is to be presumed he did, for he had some difficulty with his taped mouth, which twitched in the darkness.

"Well, I'm glad to have had this talk. I shall now see how to get to work. You must go on appearing at every possible meeting in this connection, and insist on taking your rightful position, and the popular feeling will go with us. Be ready to work night and day, night

and day, and the thing is practically done. Old Bagley [he named the local member] has not many months to live, that is certain, and the combination of ancient local feuds over the by-election would be your chance. You are young, almost a new-comer, influential and daring and idealistic—please remember that,” the benevolence of the smile might almost have been called a leer. “Be Daniel, you know, Sir Nigel; be Daniel!”

Nigel nodded, and really meant it. He was as willing to caricature that most libelled of the prophets as a thousand other talkative persons have been all the way down the ages.

If several extremely yellow lions had walked out of one of the little villa gardens that they were now racing past as they neared Cobdenmere, the incident could hardly have added to his illusion. He was now actually convinced that his dead father, Lady Phillippa, and Maudie and all the other persons connected with his past had never understood him. He was a noble fellow, after all, but it needed a political party to find it out. That situation has been known to history before.

They stopped at a stucco house pricked out in imitation brick, with Venetian blinds, and a yellow and red glass fanlight over the hall door, and Blagdon and his companion alighted and wished Sir Nigel “Good night.” The house had a low wall, built of rough white stones topped by a murderous arrangement of bits of glass stuck into new whitish mortar. The gate shut with a tinny sound, and Nigel drove on alone, elated with his success. He was well aware of the impression he had created, one of stormy ambiguity allied to a particularly smooth and oiled appearance, an irresistible combination in certain connections.

After all, he had launched out in the right direction at last, he said. The turbid sea of such local politics as these was the very one upon which to set forth his



rather battered bark anew. Wasn't he justified? His wife, an aristocrat, had spurned him; did not that give him a clear case against the aristocracy? The Church had dared to defy him on one of the rare (very rare) occasions when he had required its services; had he not then a clear case against that Popish Institution?

As for total abstinence, that banner of the one-virtue man, he could easily attach it to his mast, as his doctor had been pulling him through a long cure after his late excesses, and at lunch, certainly, he always took lithia water. If there is one thing more dangerous than a clever rogue, it is a bundle of theatrical delusions.

He had worked for more than a year to re-establish himself in the public esteem, and already his curious capacity to believe in what he first acted was beginning to convince that bench of justices, especially certain important bodies of it. He already said to himself that the death of his father, and an illness that had overtaken him six months ago, had made him more serious, had turned him to think of his own responsibilities to his class and the world, and when he looked in the glass and saw his pathetic, fair, rather fat face over a black tie, he really believed it.

He went up the short carriage drive and alighted at the door of Cobdenmere House, a square-faced Georgian building, staring flatly out on to a belt of cedars and yews, neatly clipped.

The hour was late, and the wide, low-ceiled hall, with its two fireplaces, had a lonely look, with its big white bust of Cobden staring like a whiskered ghost out of the shadows by the bookcase.

He passed on into his smoking-room, and the man brought him his letters, and papers and a tray of strangely concocted semi-medical refreshment and curry-coloured homœopathic biscuits.

He partook sparingly of these as he turned over his letters. Under the green-shaded incandescent lights

of his sanctum, more clearly than in the Saltmarsh Chapel, his face showed traces of change and bodily weakness.

There was no doubt that the illness in the preceding autumn and winter had been severe, and its effects upon his ideas and intentions may not have been wholly imaginary. Seen here in his own surroundings, the added gravity of his bearing and features, though it accompanied a sickly look of waste and flabbiness in the muscles of his face, improved him in some degree. In spite of his insincerities and follies, he seemed to have gained a trifle in dignity, with that curious grace that suffering, even deserved, has a way of bestowing.

In one of the papers a name struck itself out clear from the printed line and roused in him a pin-thrust of suggestion. It was only a paragraph about a sermon in St. Paul's by the Rev. Maurice Majorson, rather a daring sermon apparently, attacking the Pharisaical silence of society about a certain flagrant vice. It had aroused some angry comment in certain quarters and some correspondence, but it seemed to have been sane enough and honest in intention.

But this reminder of the family Ritualist was unfortunate. The light died out of Nigel's eyes as he was thrown back headlong from the triumphs of the evening to some events of over two years ago.

He and Majorson had never once communicated with one another since those two brief notes that had passed between them. Sometimes he had wondered, contemptuously, whether Majorson had been as good as his word, and if he had indeed been fool enough to try to do anything for the gutter-girl. Probably sent a Scripture-reader or a rescue-lady of savage manners and bonnet out to find her, and, by Jove! what a reception the idiots must have got for their pains! Nelly had been quite capable of taking care of herself, what with her wits and her feet. She didn't look a likely

subject for a mission of that sort, not she! Too independent for their mawkish notions.

He had carefully drummed that into his own consciousness—one could hardly say conscience—every time certain thoughts had stabbed and irritated him, especially in the weakness after his illness. But in the main he had such a wonderful talent for drawing a complete curtain over any doings or experiences of his own in even the near past, that to all intents and purposes they might never have existed. To-night it was only Majorson's name that had brought the recollection of that affair even momentarily to the fore. Well, it was all over and done with. What the family Ritualist, with his cranky, unworkable notions, thought, or did not think, was of no consequence. There would be no more trouble from him. As for Nelly, she had drifted somewhere, safe enough. That sort did. Not always upwards, of course, but what were they born to after all? That sort of thing was all heredity, environment. He was rather strong on the theory of heredity and environment, and made a mental note of it now for one of his social lectures. He felt sure it would "take" tremendously. That was what was wanted, a man who could hit the popular taste in reforms, a man who might eventually invent party cries. His experience to-night told him that he might become quite famous in that way. The future was looking rosy.

### CHAPTER XIII

"To dance attendance on their lordships' pleasures."  
HENRY VIII.

"Oh, isn't it *boring*?" said the dainty person in sheathed satin, making a perfectly definite yet invisible grimace, and picking up a fan to yawn behind.

"Wild rot," yawned the man at her side. "I'm fainting away."

"Why do they ask us?"

"Why do we come?"

"I'm sure I'm blest if I know."

"That's what I never can find out. I go on doing it, but I've been asking that question for years of everybody I know. I don't know why such stupid people get on in the world only to bore me with their parties."

"A horrid nuisance. That last creature fairly shouted her hideous song, and I call her German accent disgusting, exactly like a German waiter's; not a bit artistic. And whatever was the shrimp-pink lace frock that one of them wore? Where do they find such people? I never come across them anywhere."

"Goodness knows! In flats in Hampstead, I believe. They are amateur Bohemians, I suppose; of course the Cates get them for nothing. For my part, I admire music if it's paid for, not otherwise."

"Well, of course, if you're political you needn't be smart. No one expects it. In fact they'd be shocked if you were. Now I ask you—would I dare, being a mere woman of Society, and not an Under Secretary's wife, offer you champagne cup like that stuff in the back room downstairs?"

"Of course you wouldn't. You'd know I'd walk out. What a lot one has to swallow with a Cabinet Minister!"

"Yes, it's awful. But even they might spare us the first five-finger exercises of people in art green from nowhere. That's a way of entertaining on the cheap that I strike against.—Oh, Mrs. Rawson Cates, but *how* charming! What a delightful concert! And so interesting! Those German songs. The couplets—perfectly sweet! What an accent! How clever of you to collect all these brilliant people!"

Mrs. Rawson Cates, the hostess, looked wearily back



at her guest from under her brown toupee. She was the sister-in-law of Mrs. Alec Cates, and the wife of a rather "coming" Under Secretary, and was too sincere a woman to be quite happy as a political hostess.

"Glad you like it," she said dully, knowing perfectly well what the satin-sheathed one had certainly been saying behind her back. "All those lesser artistes are leading up to a new person whom they say really *is* brilliant, a person called 'La Nellguin.' Have you heard her? Hardly, I suppose, as I believe this is practically her first appearance. Dancer and mimic."

She passed on, trailing and winding her well-clad form through the crowd and saying the same things over and over again into the ears of the sniggering critics she was obliged to call her guests. Her eyes had that permanently worn, dragged look that one usually associates with overworked dressmakers, and her voice had become so accustomed to social repetitions that it had almost the nasal sing-song intonation of a cemetery chaplain.

Then from behind the row of gilded screens which backed a low velvet-covered dais at one end of the long French room came the person called "La Nellguin."

Or rather came a floating whirl of black chiffon, apparently suspended from the ceiling by invisible wire by the effect it produced of turning rapidly round and round as it approached but without touching the floor. An apple-blossom falling from its bough on a very still day will spin softly round and round till it alights on the grass, by some dainty mystery of gravity.

By some miracle of foot and body manipulation, quite invisible in its workings, this cloudy black thing so twirled into the middle of the stage, ceased, and bowed, with spread hands and grave lily face.

The sudden storm of clapping was quite spontaneous. It was the wild clap of bored people suddenly interested and delighted. La Nellguin wore a chiffon frock only

a little short of the ankles, but very voluminously laced under its billowy skirts. Against its sable shadows and the background of gold screens and *vieux-rose* velvet stage, the clear whiteness of her face, neck, and hands were cut out like fine ivory, and the gleaming line of a green jade comb and fillet in her hair, parallel with the line of her scarlet mouth, were the only points of colour.

She broke into movement, to delicate music, but rather ordinary. A Spanish dance, with an improvised mantilla tossed on to the green comb and twirled in the usual way.

"Very pretty, but not new," said the satin-sheathed lady.

"Old as the hills," said the man who didn't know why he had come, but leaning forward and watching, nevertheless.

"What's she doing with her hands—look!"

"Extraordinary. Patting her hair?"

"Yes, but look at the arm akimbo, with the little finger stuck out. Why, that's Natalia's pet trick. How brazen to copy it!"

"But, I say, I believe she means to." He glanced at the pink satin programme. "What's it, what's it?—Penguin? No, here it is. See, she's down as a mimic. She's *doing* Natalia. By Jove!"

And clearly as the girl danced it could be seen that she was not only adopting the now famous attitude of a world-famous Spanish opera singer, but had caught and was expressing a hundred other tricks of the same lady. Madame Natalia had stood in a statuesque "akimbo" for years, one hand on her hip, the little finger extended. It was intended to express careless grace, and combined with the careless ease and glory of her voice it did so, to the gallery. But sometimes Madame worried about her hair—she was very vain, and had another trick, not intentional, of putting up

her right hand and touching it into shape. And, of course, like everybody else, she had a thousand other small mannerisms mostly indescribable, tilts of her chin, ways of smiling, manner of taking bouquets, and so on.

All these, and fifty others that no one had actually grasped sufficiently to be conscious of, this fairy-footed girl now reproduced with lightning rapidity.

She even, as she did it, seemed to resemble Madame Natalia in face, though there were two generations between them. And the wonder of it was its delicacy, its prettiness, its unerring truth without harsh caricature. Natalia herself could not have been offended, she might even have been flattered. The applause burst forth in laughter as well as clapping, as the dancer's accompanist broke into a few bars of Gilda's staircase song in *Rigoletto*, one of the great singer's most famous parts.

And now began an exciting game of rapid guess-work, for La Nellguin, hardly stopping, dropped her mantilla, and picking up a bunch of carnations laid for her on a little gold table, broke into a spirited and rattling step, played with the flowers, tore them and threw them as she whirled past and round, pelted the audience with them, laughed in a hard, banjo giggle, stooped, twisted, "cake-walked," and wriggled, and got a fearful thunder of applause before the musician could get in his few bars of "Yankee Doodle," proving this to be a notorious young American Duchess, who recently, at her own wedding, had pelted the guests in church with the carnations from her own bouquet, hitting a certain royal personage in the face.

One impersonation succeeded another. A famous minister, a man of sedentary habits, was brilliantly shown by a weird kind of slow two-step, done with a stooping head and a certain languor of expression, and then by the dancer flinging herself in apparently one

movement on to a chair, stretched out at full length with her small ankles neatly crossed on the little gold table in a well-known House of Commons attitude. This sudden flop into recumbency occurred after each round—three times—and was included in the dance.

It was followed by a sketch which only one in the innermost ring of society affairs could possibly know how to do. These lightning personality sketches—one could call them that, although they were danced—succeeded one another without a pause, till twenty-five persons, famous in society and politics, had been danced into being before the public eye and guessed by the crowd. When at last, for sheer want of breath even, the dancer gave in, bowed, spread her white hands, and twirled out as she had twirled in with the rose-petal movement, the Under Secretary's guests broke out into breakers of applause and laughing comment, tossed this way and that, asked who she was and how she knew and where she came from, and a hundred more questions which everybody was far too excited to answer. It was a real triumph for Mrs. Rawson Cates.

That lady's worried eyes were blinking with excited astonishment as she tried in vain to answer all the questions now poured upon her.

"I really hardly know anything about her. Ask my sister, Mrs. Alec Cates. I got her to please my sister. She is her protégée."

Mrs. Alec Cates, thus brought into demand, became very pink over her diamonds, and raised her eyebrows and shook her head many times, and breathed fast, and wouldn't say anything.

"Ask the Princess Max!" was all she would say, with a delightful ambiguity.

But, of course, as it was obvious that nobody could ask the Princess Max, who was not at this party, and who could not, in any case, being royal, be interrogated,



this remark only helped to fan the flame of excitement and curiosity.

"All I can say is I got her to oblige a friend," said little Mrs. Alec. "A very famous, interesting, important friend—now!"

She shrugged the plump expanse of her shoulders, and fussed and curvetted about in the little rings of enquirers, gloriously happy at last. The cards she usually got up her sleeves were so rarely trumps. The lions she usually collected were so apt to have no real roar when you got them gambolling among your guests, that this *début* was as a surprise packet to a child.

"Where does she come from?" said a handsome old peer, with some yellow tinting in the grey of his whiskers.

"I believe she was fished up out of the sea," fluttered Mrs. Alec. "They say so."

"Where?"

"Off the coast of France, someone said, but I mustn't say who."

"But she isn't French, is she?"

"Three miles that side of the Channel limits the fishing boats, doesn't it?" she replied. "I suppose anyone found on a crested wave in the fishing boundary of any country would count as belonging to it."

"Waves, waves? Well, well, she looks like it, the way she billows and surges and ebbs. Rather a nice fairy tale—I mean mermaid tail—to invent about a lady, only mermaids can't dance for obvious reasons! Come, Mrs. Alec, you must embroider it a bit. Tell us where she got her—feet!"

He passed on chuckling, to the rapture of Mrs. Alec, who thought she had made him laugh, and all the time it was his own joke which was filling him with joy. Still, the credit would come round to her after all. She felt that she was getting along splendidly to-night.

She could have hugged La Nellguin for being so talked about. If only the other lions one schemed for, and pandered to, and put up with, would always behave so well! As a rule, they had such fads, such notions of themselves, such horrible, sudden, unforgivable independences. They wired at the last minute and told you they weren't coming, after you had invited hosts to meet them and perjured yourself black in the face with flattery to them. What was a genius, after all, but a person to back up a bad menu?

"I hate genius," Mrs. Alec always said. "It is so unmanageable. The airs clever people give themselves are too awful for words. If this goes on I shall have to pay a better cook and give up intellectual aspirations altogether. I've tried to be spiritual and deep for years, but what help do I get from the poets and writers and singers and those? Nothing! They fail more often than the ragouts, and I'm getting tired of the risk. What do they really care for the Arts? Nothing. My Tuesdays will have to turn to buns."

But this girl was a darling! She must write to dear Lady Phillippa and thank her. And all that would come round to the Princess, and she would shine as a benefactor!

As for the heroine herself, she was at the top tree of happiness. This was her first appearance at anything like one of the big parties of the year, following on one or two afternoon affairs at smart and famous women's clubs, and it was clear enough to her that she had turned the scales of success to-night. All the time that she was dancing and impersonating she had had the eye of that curious second consciousness, which was one of her odd talents, on the massed and glittering crowd in front of her; and through the merriment and vivacity, the joy of performing, she was aware of certain faces, certain more coloured and defined personalities standing out clear from the flutter

and glitter of the rest holding her sub-consciousness like the stronger figures in a dream. That was her method of becoming acquainted with the *nuance* of any one person, the details being acquired later on; and she fell into it now, at the height of her performance, as naturally as though she were a passive onlooker and critic, and not the centre of it all herself. To-night, of these cloudy impressions of personal forces in the room, there was one which was faintly irritating, antagonistic. She felt that with a sense of chill, the while she acted and danced a famous woman Socialist with incomparable grace and humour. Horrid, that chill—twirl, trip-trip, pirouette, chassez—a white, earthy face against a curtain, far at the back, that located it—jump on to the small table and stand there as on a hustings and pretend to harangue a street audience in rhythmic dumb-show—heavy, that earthy white face, watchful, hard and gloomy, and afraid. One was sure afraid, though why? Land lightly off the table like a bird, act fighting a policeman, all in the steps of a dance, fall back into the music striking up the tell-tale air, attention, heels together, bow, smile—done! But that thing of fear by the far curtain, what is that? A second's breathing space in the shower of clapping before one begins again—that reveals the face as actually a face, that of a man, fair, not very tall, very well built. Not to be clearly recognized at this distance over this sea of waving fans and shimmering jewels, and the black and white blurs of evening-clad men. But an outline that suggests a locality, that turns the pale shining oak of this brilliant room into a beach-line, the moving scintillation of the guests into the unutterable glitter of the Channel, the waving of fans to the flutter of *peignoirs des bains* on a washing-line, and the laughing, radiant, triumphant dancer herself to a little castaway at Lisys-sur-mer.

The impression of a moment, yet vital. Back again into another fantastic impersonation; another dance, another nonsense masque. Round and round, in and out, up and down, here and there, flutter, glitter, banter, baffle; curvet, chassez, fancy, ravish, and the thing is brought to a daintily triumphant close, an uproarious close, a close of hailstones of clapping, encores, and loosed tongues.

There was no doubt about the completeness of the success. She had practically created the Under Secretary's party, and he, in common with his guests, was willing to acknowledge it.

He came up now, a grave, correct figure, rather like a butler in appearance, and shook hands with her as she stood bowing and kissing her hands deprecatingly to her applauders.

Gallantly he crooked his arm, and invited her to leave the platform by way of the room instead of the little simulated green-room door, in response to the flattering curiosity of his guests, and after a second's pause she accepted, making a triumphal, stately little exit on the great man's arm, bowing to the right and the left of her in answer to the pressed and curious faces crowding on either side, and out at the end door by the blue curtain. The quaint progress lasted but a few seconds, but it was a stroke that was to alter the course of her fate. Arrived at the curtain, her swift glance turned to that earthy-white face which had sagged into her consciousness as she danced.

Her eyes met full with Nigel's. The look bridged chasms of change in both. No common acknowledgment passed between them. They stared as two dead, separated by centuries, might stare at one another, roused simultaneously by the same trumpet blast, otherwise unaware of an introduction. They stared, each with the vague blankness of moribund feeling, yet in the wide blue eyes of the man by the door there



was also fear, a horrid curling, shattering fear. He was pressed back against the curtained wall as though to get himself wedged into it. Clearly he did not want to be seen. Yet very clearly he must look, against his will, utterly perhaps against his interests.

The head of the dancer turned away quickly, with an elevation of the rounded chin, otherwise the full carelessness of a laugh and nod in response to the crowd of men by the door was unimpaired.

Her grave and great host conducted her past all these and gave her, with a bow and some warm thanks, in charge of a cloak-room maid, and she was left alone with her marvellous triumph and the ghosts of Lisy-sur-mer.

She stood still a moment to unclench her tightened fingers, and to still the furious pulsing of her heart, while the maid began to put her wraps upon her. Otherwise she made no outward sign.

But away in the long *salon* one man was saying to another—

“But I say, Finroy, isn’t she quite stunning!”

“Stunning,” said Nigel, and meant it quite literally. His hand was not yet steady after it.

“They say she’s a mystery,” the other man went on. “I tried to get it out of Cates where she came from and what she is, but he swears he doesn’t know himself. Nobody seems to know, or else they’re paid to make a mystery of it. Probably it’s a dodge!”

“Probably.”

“They do that, these suburban nobodies with a bit of talent, to make themselves catch on. A bit of mystery, eh?”

“A mystery, yes.”

“Always takes, that does, with the public, though it’s been played out years and years ago! I’ll bet you anything that there’s nothing behind this but a little paper and tobacco shop in Brixton or something of

that sort. 'The veiled woman in black' and all that rot never does weary the man in the street, when all the time one can see the works and hear them working. What fools we are! Hang it, if I don't just make a point of hounding this particular 'mystery' play to earth, if only for the sport of showing it up! Mrs. Alec Cates is the woman to nail first of all. Good old Mrs. Alec! Here goes to find her!"

He pushed his way through the crowd, and Nigel turned and went quickly and quietly down the stairs, got his hat and coat, and went out into the street.

His roundly built, good-looking face was set and ashy, and he walked along the night streets unseeingly, with little regard to direction, an expression of puzzling horror in his eyes.

Remorse could not come to him, for he had never seen another person's point of view in his life, and probably never would; and after all, it is an occasional illuminated flash of that capacity that alone makes remorse possible.

What he did show was fear; a strange, unexplainable, cringing fear, that strung up his finger-tendons, and made his square chin and mouth look queerly chapfallen for the first time in his life.

## CHAPTER XIV

"Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas."

PASCAL.

IN the cloak-room the breathless dancer, suddenly energetic, waved the maid aside and robed herself rapidly in a long lined coat of grey, and put a dark fur toque on to her hair, changed her shoes with business-like celerity, and hurried out into the night, by way of the humble hansom, to the Underground Railway, in

which she travelled, grave and absorbed, to the Mansion House Station. Here she alighted, and hurried along the dark streets, and went up Litany Lane. She stopped a few doors up, produced a latchkey, by which she let herself into a narrow house, next door but two to the Sisterhood.

The ground floor was occupied by offices connected with one of the warehouses that adjoined at the back, and she went straight up two flights of the uncarpeted stairs to a couple of rooms on the third floor. She entered the first one, a shabby little sitting-room, of no pretensions. Here she turned on the gas, which was burning low, and poked up the remnants of a fire and looked round defiantly.

The floor was strewn here and there with baby's toys of a homely sort—a cane rattle, a woolly sheep with its features licked off, a doll in rabbit fur, much the worse for wear, and one rather shabby shoe.

“La Nellguin's” defiance seemed to be directed at these objects. She stooped down and swept them up with two or three comprehensive strokes of her arm, and gathering them into a careless heap, tossed them into a little wooden cradle without more ado.

Then she took off her hat and coat, and put a little kettle on the fire, and brought forward a tray, roughly laid out with preparations for a small supper.

Her face had hardened since she came in, and she got her trifling comforts together listlessly, under the weight of a heavier thought than how to make the grey fire blaze enough to do its work.

A ring at the front-door bell echoing up the house startled her, and she paused a moment before going down the deep staircase to answer herself at that hour of night. Her rooms were practically chambers, and the caretaker was by this time probably in bed in her cellar apartments. If so, her deafness made it unlikely that she would hear. A knock followed the ring. She

thought suddenly of the Sisters, and a charge of hers that they had. Could anything be wrong?

She threw a fluffy boa round her low-cut dress shoulders, and ran downstairs and opened the door. Not the Sisters confronted her, but the square-shouldered, neat outline of a man in black.

"Oh, Father," she said, relieved. "Is it only you? Come in."

"Too late, by a long way. Look here, I'll just step inside this door for two minutes, just to tell you that he is quite safe, and was peacefully sleeping at the last report."

"You are very good," she said listlessly, and drew herself back into the dim doorway.

"I thought you would like to know before you slept yourself. He looked such a darling."

"Oh, yes." She went further back into the shadow. A street lamp flickered in at the fanlight and made chequers in the narrow hall. She did not want his eyes, glowing with some enthusiasm of his own, to see the anger in hers.

"He was splendid!" he said warmly, still watching her as far as he was able. "He never cried once, Sister Kate said."

"All right. Thank you, Father. But you haven't asked me about to-night"; her tone was half pettish.

"I thought you'd want to know about the boy," he replied. "The first night of parting from him! Other people would have wanted to know!"

"Ye-es, well, now you've told me," she answered. 'Haven't you? I'm glad he's all right. So he ought to be good with Sister Kate. She is an angel with children. Father, it *was* a success to-night! Glorious! Better than any of us dreamed of! I could hardly get away, they were so excited about me."

He stood with his arms clasped behind him, and



looked down at what he could see of her in the fanlight flicker.

"Was it?" he said slowly. Then after a minute, "I suppose it was. Glorious! Intoxicating! The lunacy of vanity. I congratulate you—not your guardian angel!"

The street light caught the gleam of some small brilliants in the green comb and the pouting line of her red mouth and pretty chin, otherwise the thick cloud of her hair, with her head bent, cast her eyes and brow into dusky shadow. She played crossly with the ends of her boa.

"You *will* see everything in a Church way," she retorted. "Yet you wanted me to get on, and I have. Aren't you pleased?"

His answer came slowly. "Why shouldn't I be pleased? Of course I'm pleased that you've got on. Haven't I worked for it?"

"Oh, of course you have. That's why. I've got you to thank for everything—you and Brother Terry."

"You've got Brother Terry to thank for training your talent and bringing it out too. He did all that. I am only the guardian of—all the lot of you," he laughed a little, but constrainedly. There was a note of sadness in the banter of his voice, and he seemed to be trying to see her expression and failing, as she kept her head persistently down in the shadow.

"I am little Simon's guardian," he added, his tones warming to an intense tenderness. "And your bully! There now. So you see you mustn't expect me to throw up my hat when you turn the heads of a London Society party. I've got to think of your own getting turned, haven't I?"

"It won't do that," she said with sudden decision, and raising her face to a line of light in which he could see it, even mark a hardness in its poise and expression. "I've set myself to win fame and success,

to get money, and to hold my own. I've worked for it for nearly three years—it seems like twenty. I'm not likely to turn giddy when I get it—now I've got it, I might almost say. You see it isn't like an extra thing, this success. It's a necessity. I've got nothing else in the world—nothing." Her voice thrilled oddly from the darkness. "As I've lost what other women are proud of, what even you admire above all things, kind as you have been, why then I'll fight! I'll fight with cleverness, if I have to do it with my nails and teeth. Nothing but cleverness wins—and frightens. Nothing. To-night I got in—the first blow." She paused with the passion of her own thoughts.

He tossed his head in the way he always did when he meant to shake it, and said nothing, only looking down compassionately on the tumultuous thing in the shadow.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, and riches!—of course one must get the means to do it all well. That's a power too. And I shall have that. The agent told Brother Terry that I should be run after night and day. It all means money, quick money. I shall be rich."

"And little Simon?" he said. He gave a sort of big sigh that ended in a groan. "I'd be proud to-night to think that I could work for such a child." His voice fell into a great gentleness, as though thinking aloud. "I'd think of all I could do for him. Educate him, teach him, make him grow up well and beautiful and gloriously good. Give him to God, to serve at His altar, and afterwards make him a priest. Make him little Samuel, the sanctuary child." His voice thrilled. "Make what was a sin and a woe into a glory for God. You've promised me that already. Go on with that work."

"You can do all that, Father," she said, but

less harshly, a little touched. "That is priest's work."

"Is it?" he said. "I think a mother is a priest."

There was a silence.

"If you call me that to-night I shall scream," she said very low. The two slim hands holding the ends of the fluffy feather boa were rigid.

"Why do you speak so?"

She paused, thinking, and then threw down the boa ends carelessly.

"Oh, well, well, isn't it bad enough to have wanted to be a lady and to be—to be—spoilt like that at the start?"

He did not reply, but took both her hands and held them a minute, warmly. He felt her heaving under his steady hold, half battling against its restraint, half at her own fury. He screwed the twisty eyebrow into a sort of grim little smile in the dark at her struggles, and then suddenly threw down the hands.

"Very well, I *shall* hold you, but by the cords of prayer, whether you like it or not. Both of you, both of you, till I draw you to where you are willed to come. Good night now."

He opened the narrow front door and was gone. She heard his decisive footsteps go neatly along the pavement back to the church buildings.

She stood there a minute after he had left her in the bare, ghostly passage with the chequers from the fanlight shaken wanly by the night wind on the lamp outside. She heard the big clock of St. Simon Cordwayners chime one of the quarters, and knew it to be very late, and herself suddenly utterly weary with excitement and triumph. She crept back up the two flights of stairs with a step that showed it to be a physical fact, but she did not pity herself at all. She was glorying, almost savagely glorying in her success. She had meant to do it, and she had done it. To-

morrow she would do more, and the days after more and more, and more still. She went back into the small room and undressed and lay down in her cool bed, glad of it, but without a regret for the absent child. The kingdoms of the world were all going to be hers, as weapons to fight those who had trodden her down. To-night they were spread out before her. All she had to worship to get them was talent, push, power. She would get them, then, and tread on her enemies. To-night she had trodden on Nigel. She laughed as she remembered it. She felt as if she had put her pretty little foot on his face.

It was her first blow back for all the blows he had given her. Deep in her fiery heart were treasured up all the scenes of the last two years and a half, the shame that she had not felt at first, but which had gradually come upon her: the long, silent, brooding hatred of shame. The scenes in the white hospital ward that hot, arid August, the pitying visits of the Sisters and Maggie Higgle, her only friends; the first cry of the infant that she did not know what to do with; her tears, her rages, her inward, unutterable defiance.

Then the home-coming, back to her friends in Litany Lane, but this time in rooms of her own, as an independent woman, a carpet-worker. Her shunning of the Brothers, her horror of meeting Mr. Majorson, of finding his eyes upon her, however pitying, as they always were. But he had said very little then, only lent her a few books, and seen that she had work and women friends.

How she had brooded and flagged for months in that long, hot autumn over her carpet-making! How they had taken the dreadful baby and christened it for her—Simon, after the name of the church. How they had dedicated it to be brought up for the priesthood if when it grew up it should be willing. It! She could



not give him the individuality of a sex, much less dream of his ever having a will, or becoming a priest like Mr. Majorson. She had let them do what they liked with him. To her he was shame, a pretty, sometimes rather droll little exponent of it; but shame.

Then came the time when she had taken up her lessons again, slowly at first, then hotly, with a sense of power and capacity to learn that she had never had before. Before she had done it all blindly, imitatively. Now she did it with knowledge and skill, with dogged pride, with a fierce determination growing in her day by day to learn it to fight her way with. No longer as a child, but as a relentless business woman.

And to-night she had reached the point for which she had been wrestling and striving in silence all those long months of suffering and grim, patient labour. She would go out into the world now, and show them all what she could do—show him, Mr. Majorson, that she was no longer the stricken penitent, but all that he had hoped for her and meant her to be.

He should see, he should see. To-night he did not realize it—how could he, a priest, away here in this dark, dreary old lane, with his works for the poor and the unfortunate, but out of touch with the glittering scenes she had been in to-night?

The next morning she was up early to prepare for her now usual tuition from a professional teacher in Chancery Lane. The day being brilliant, she put on her smartest morning costume and an extra jaunty hat and went round to the Sisterhood.

It was her house of call at almost all hours on her way, and had been such ever since she had returned from the hospital that memorable August. The exigencies of her training had made her an unsuitable inmate for their life of devotional routine, but as a petted friend she had a welcome at any time.

To-day Sister Kate came almost running into the

little bare waiting-room with its high blue colour-washed walls and impossible oleographs, happily hidden from the eye and tongue of Brother Jalfin, and said—

“Come, child, into the kindergarten, and see what they have done to him!”

Nelly tripped after her through several white passages, with here and there small shrines formed by niches in the walls, containing some specimen of the Cordwayners’ carving or painting, and out through some tiny cloisters, low and whitewashed, and into a school-room devoted to the double purpose of crèche and kindergarten.

It was noisy with the chatter of innumerable little tongues, and was a whirl of baby movement. Here two Sisters sat playing with a beautiful dark child of about two years old, round-limbed and serious of mien. His intent, dark grey eyes, that in some lights looked brown, were Nelly’s own, and his extremely thick hair of dark chestnut was hers; but there was a nobility about his baby features and the carriage of his head which gave him a curious distinction for so young a child; the squareness of his face and the slightly petulant mouth alone recalled another face. The adoring Sisters were having a joke with him, and had rigged him up in a scanty frock of new red flannel, to simulate an acolyte’s cassock, and had placed over it a long-sleeved tight muslin pinafore, lace-edged, and sewn up at the back, thus forming a tiny cotta. Upon his head they had put a hastily made skull-cap of red flannel, round which the dark fluff of his hair hung soberly on to his shoulders like a little French priest’s. Into the dimpled fists of this toy thurifer they had put a tiny wool-case, censer-shaped, and of silver filigree work, with little chains, and were now busy trying to induce him to swing it and not to lick it.

Sister Kate immediately prostrated herself before this shrine, kneeling on the floor before the boy, her

face shining. But the child, seeing his pretty mother, stopped suddenly with the censer to his lips, staring up at her in baby wonder gravely, then flung down his toy, opened his arms wide, and crowed out a few infantine words of welcome, all incoherent and jumbled together.

She put out her hands and took him mechanically from the Sister, but without any show of enthusiasm, as the women of the very poor will often pick up their children. The dress she wore, ready for her dancing lesson, the whole cut and carriage of her, was that of a little lady of the world, and she had seemed to the Sisters quite a vision of refined beauty, a sort of Princess of the outer gaieties, with vivacious eyes, neat of figure, and prompt and dainty of movement.

Yet this one dull gesture gave her away suddenly. It was the gesture of the submerged, overburdened woman, the slave-mother, who is such against her will, such to her own physical loss, her own downtreading, but who accepts her bare responsibilities with a kind of dumb philosophy that can hardly be called interest, much less joy.

When the clock struck eleven, and the Sisters with adoring hearts took back the baby Simon into their arms and care, Nelly rather hurriedly said she must go, and began putting on her long gloves and bursting into a sudden recital of her triumphs of the night before.

"The Duchess of Portrush was there, all in diamonds and a dress hand-painted in panels in a cloud of pearl-grey. Oh, lovely! but a horrid old thing. They say she was wild when I did her new daughter-in-law throwing the carnations! And I only got it from snapshots and from Brother Terry taking me that day to see her at the New Gallery. Private view, when there was a portrait of her vain little self put up, and she was mincing about in front of it! And everybody recognized Mrs. Bathshaw before I'd finished even, and shouted

with laughter. I've got a whole list more to learn, and I'm going with Brother Terry to study them one by one. Won't it be fun! Oh, it's all going to be a great success, and they're all writing about me in the papers!"

She nodded, kissed her hand to the Sisters, whose wondering faces looked up at her almost as quaintly and uncomprehendingly as little Simon's, and tripped off to catch the 'bus that took her to her lesson in Chancery Lane.

When it was over she found Terry Alders waiting for her, very jubilant and full of last night's triumph. He had one or two cuttings from papers in his possession, and kept fingering them joyfully.

"Yes, you shall see them. Come out to lunch. I've got permission to take you," he said.

"Permission?"

"I mean from the Master Cordwayner. Come along. There are some types you can study where I shall take you."

She pouted a little in the cab, putting on her gloves.

"How long shall I have to ask the Master Cordwayner what I may or may not do?" she asked.

He looked at her and whistled.

"You can whistle! Phew!" She leant back in the cab and did him exactly, the whimsical enquiry in his eyes, the quaint astonishment. "Still, I say, how long? Surely when I can earn enough money to be rich—or richish, I mean—I needn't go on being treated like a child! A convent child!"

"He is an ecclesiastic. He will always treat everybody like a child. To him all the world is full of children. That's a priest's way. Lots of women like it," he added.

"Do they? Ah! that's because they know they aren't, really! They only pretend to be, to see him lording it over them! That's always funny. But I want



to get along by myself now. I've shown that I can, come!"

"Yes, since he taught you," he said airily.

"Since *you* taught me. It is you who have done everything to help me to get on."

"At his desire."

There was a pause.

"Why are you so cross with him suddenly?" Terry asked.

"Why does he hold me on here now I've got a profession? His eyes go through me like pins. He makes me feel like a butterfly in a collection."

"Well, so you are!"

"I'm not, Brother. I'm an independent professional woman of the world, and I want to make him recognize it. He treats me like a child or a prisoner. I am neither. I want to go out into the world and strike the people who trod—who would have trodden upon me in the old days. I mean to. He can order and check and correct as he likes. I'll do it now, if I have to fight him to let me go."

"You're a hard little villain," was Terry's reply, in his usual peaceable accents. "Sorry I've educated you, if that's all you're going to make of it."

"You shall see what I'll make of it," she answered grimly, and sulked a little.

"Rather early days to be talking of going out into the world, too," said her companion ruminatively. "You only began in public a month ago, and we didn't know quite what a furore you'd create. Nobody could be *quite* sure. There's always a chance about these things. Lady Phillippa worked the Mars Club for you, which was a jolly start, but all these other bigwigs have come along by a sort of lucky fluke, it seems to me."

"Yes, I know. But there *are* the 'bigwigs,' and I mean to conquer them, make them go on bowing down

to me, subdue them, tread on them, kick them," she said savagely, her intent eyes level with the hidden spleen of a recollection. Was it the earth-face by the curtain of last night? Terry was going to make a chaffing answer, but he caught the look of memory and stopped himself, remembering what bitterness she had gone through in the past two years. She never spoke of such things. Her lack of loquacity in this had won his respect. After all, if at the moment of her first triumph they recurred to her, wasn't it a sign of what he called "decency" of feeling?

Still, she must not be disloyal to Majorson. That was a phase of her mood he could not understand and certainly would not tolerate.

"Well, don't kick the Father Abbot," he said casually. "He is a saint, and out of your ken—and mine too, perhaps. He is to be thanked for your very existence, and has a right to be the master of it."

"The way all the Brothers worship him!" she said. "I do too, of course, but I mustn't even wriggle when he orders me about without all you coming down on me about his splendiness!"

"He's our chief," was all he said, and taking out his little paper slips proceeded to read out to her some of her own press notices.

This diverted her attention, and when they reached the "Savoy," and they glided in and out between the tables to a seat by the window overlooking the river, she had forgotten her little gust of temper, and undulated and dimpled at seeing her own fame reflected in the faces at the tables. She was pointed out right and left, studied, smiled at, sniggered about, admired and criticized as the case might be. She was already becoming sufficiently used to public notice to accept all its varying forms with an equal *sang-froid*. A giggle behind her back caused her little more interest than a compliment to her face. It was beginning to be the

obvious, the ordinary thing to expect, and some of her inborn philosophy here came to her aid and made her cool in the face of it.

She learnt all her lessons, took in the tricks of several celebrities and committed them to her marvellous memory, laughed, enjoyed herself, and came back to prepare for another big affair that evening at the house of a beautiful young Countess, with a heart on fire with courage and joy. She had them at her feet literally. Nigel should be there too. But as the weeks went by her determination to free herself grew steadily. The time had come for her to spread her own wings, to get away from the past that held her.

True to her word, a week or two later she had a brief encounter with Majorson. It was under the plane tree in the courtyard, where on a fine May morning it was possible to sit and imagine oneself in a garden. Two cane chairs placed side by side beneath the horizontal boughs and fan-like leaves of it gave anyone with a Londoner's gorgeous imagination that feeling.

"You've been tugging for a long time now," Majorson was saying quietly, a grim little twinkle in his eyes. "I guessed you'd come to me and ask outright one of the days."

The neat-footed brilliant person on the other chair poked a hole between the flagstones with her silk parasol.

"Then you are not angry?"

"Certainly not. Because you will still be under my control."

She started.

"Oh, but I mean a flat, away, say in Bayswater, all to myself."

"I can control people in flats, even in Bayswater."

"But I am striking for—for independence."

"Strike then," he said, crossing one leg over the other and holding it as he looked at her under his eyebrows

with what Terry now called that "pinned-beetle-in-a-collection" look. "You are welcome to strike. You are welcome to go away and live away. Still I hold you."

"But how?"

"By the power of the archangels and dominations who have you in their keeping at my years of desire. Now! My prayer, that brought down the driving force of God into you to give you strength to do what you have done, will also hold you in cords that you cannot break." His tone was solemn, almost passionate.

"Then I may really go?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And leave Simon with the Sisters for a time?"

"For ever, if that is possible," he answered, knitting his odd brows and searching her face. "He is an offering to the altar. You go out into the world yourself, leaving that angel-child with me—as a hostage."

"Thank you, Father. Thank you ever so." Her face was radiant as she looked dreamily and unseeingly across at the pigeons on the school wall. Her eyes were shining so at the vision of what lay before her that she did not see the expression of his face now resting upon her. It was a look that had in it the warmth of all loves, father's, mother's, friend's, and lover's, gathered up into one great enveloping passion; all the world of tenderness, masterhood, and protection.

He put out his thin brown hand and laid it upon hers as it rested on her chair-arm and held it. She turned, recalled by the touch, stooped quickly, half laughing, and kissed it very lightly, like a butterfly.

But like a butterfly she flew away to her new home and life.



## CHAPTER XV

"I was in readiness  
Whenever God should please she needed me,  
Then, do you know, her face looked down on me  
With a look that placed a crown on me."

BROWNING.

'THE clergy ought really to marry, if only to help one to get 'off' one's plainer nieces," said Mrs. Cates, fanning herself crossly.

"Yes, they are suitable as relations," said her friend, "though out of date to marry oneself. They went out, matrimonially, about the end of the eighties, and have never really come in again. The Church is not what it was."

"No. Still, it is very respectable to have it in the family. Especially when there are many girls with only small fortunes to provide for. My sister's girls now—not Mrs. Rawson's, of course, they go to Court and lead a society life, and have every known opportunity—but my sister Mrs. Hume-Wrigley, down at Redhill. Her dear girls are rather on my hands just now. Cara is the most charming, sweet, dear girl in the world."

"You mean the one with prominent teeth and decided opinions?"

"Yes. She does a wonderful kind of art embroidery on sacking, and goes out in the rain carrying brown-paper parcels—what could be more suitable for a clergyman's wife? They like them like that. And, of course, so do parishes. I believe most congregations insist on goloshes. And Cara can hack out poor people's clothes in flannel with a pair of gardener's

scissors at twice the pace of all the other unmarried women connected with her church. And she is really proud of having worn one horse-cloth coat and skirt for four years. And she never really does her hair, and comes to stay with you with a hold-all. I should have thought there would be no difficulty about her future. Yet I have introduced her to all the clergy I know, and things seem to hang fire ! ”

“ Well, well, the clergy are not what they used to be. They are getting so unsociable. It’s these Ritualists and Socialists who have spoilt them ! For my part, I am always willing to give them a guinea for their poor-relief subscriptions if I can be sure that they will be ready to fill in a ‘ failed ’ dinner guest’s place, or call on my ‘ At Home ’ afternoons. But as often as not it is money completely thrown away. Look at dear Canon Slimson over there—now how different he is ! One meets him everywhere.”

“ They *do* say he is let out by Whiteley’s,” whispered Mrs. Cates, perfectly serious, with distended eyes, as though enquiring into this as a possibility.

“ Oh, I don’t think so. He wouldn’t need it. He has to go about a great deal to explain to people why he hasn’t been made a Bishop. Society expects him to now, and invites him for that purpose. They say the reasons are different every time. He is a wonderfully learned and ingenious man, and talks fascinatingly on all subjects, and on all sides of them, too. You never find out his real opinions. That is such a relief, nowadays. The modern clergy have far too many.”

Mrs. Cates looked across the room to where sat a tall, good-looking cleric of about sixty years, mobile of face, with full grey hair brushed far back and worn slightly long on to his collar. A low white cravat decorated his well-cut neck, and he had pretty, woman’s hands, with which he gesticulated gracefully when especially sympathetic. He leant back now in a deep

chair, deeply sympathizing with an excited and overdressed lady, very stout, but "preserved," who poured out a long story over a cup of iced coffee. Both seemed deeply wrapped in the discussion. Mrs. Cates considered him carefully for a moment.

"After all, they are talking French, and that is Lady Trigney, the soap man's third wife," she commented thoughtfully. "Perhaps I have been wrong in pushing Cara amongst the parsons in the West. Their tastes would get smarter naturally, moving in such good sets. After Lady Trigney she would seem countrified."

"*He* wouldn't carry parcels in the rain, I should imagine," said her friend a little unkindly.

"But I can try the East End," said Mrs. Cates dreamily over her coffee, her reflective eye still fixed on Canon Slimson's well turned out figure. "There I am sure they would *like* string-bags. Why, talking of string, there are those queer, interesting men they call the Cordwayners! I know Mr. Majorson. I'll take Cara there. And he's well connected, though odd. I can interest her in the East London Offering. She would understand it, I expect, and could prompt me if I went wrong."

She seemed so revived and pleased with the idea that she rose shortly after and left the hot, crowded afternoon party, determined to write at once to the derelict Cara; and about a week later Litany Lane was invaded by her niece and herself in full feather.

Mr. Majorson, to an unnerving, running commentary of Brother Jalfin's, had the pleasant task of taking his guests round the entire set of buildings, church, vicarage, "shop," and schools. It was a hot, shadeless sort of day, and the devoted chatter of Mrs. Cates and the supercilious gush of Cara were rather trying. He wished them anywhere else, but tried to be courteous and patient.

A high school had taught Cara all that there was or wasn't to be known about all arts—ethics, sociology, theology, and science. It had only failed to teach her how to be nice.

To-day she wished to be fascinating, but even more she wished to astound and startle by her knowledge of everything shown to her. Her smart little aunt seemed quite femininely ignorant against her, and was therefore taken under Brother Jalfin's fierce wing as the least horrible of two horrors, and conducted round the "show" sights with some faint toleration and rough courtesy. Cara was left to Majorson.

"I am so interested in the problem of the East," she said, with a noble expression that came truculent against her intention, partly owing to the teeth and partly to her eagerness.

"This is not really the East, you know," Majorson explained. "We are just within the confines of the old City wall. One of the ancient City gates stood just by this church."

"Oh, I know *all* about that!" laughed Cara Hume-Wrigley, with patronage. "But I understand that your work extends East? Some of your people, poor clerks and those sad creatures who work in City offices, live East?"

"That is true enough. We gather in a great many of the people from there." He proceeded to tell her something of the Cordwayners' "lunch-hour" work, supposing her to be really interested, and his own mind running much and sadly on one little Eastern lady who had tramped up from her marshes and entered by that ghostly City gate and crossed out West again, to conquer that, taking their hearts along with her.

But Cara broke in with a string of statistics with regard to poverty and crime, rattled off at such a pace that he was suddenly silent. He let her talk. She was so hardly confident and theoretical and noisy that she



did not require entertaining, evidently. After all, life might knock it out of her, he reflected. If not she would end up as a Frubbert. This prospect seemed so awful a punishment to his mind that he could afford to be patient with the victim, and was so.

After an exhaustive afternoon the two ladies said good-bye and ascended the fussy motor waiting outside, and Mrs. Cates leaned out, pressing something into Mr. Majorson's hand.

"I know there is a special effort being made for the work in the East just now," she said, with melting sweetness. "The East End Offering! The Princess told me. Here is our little contribution, my niece's and mine. Take it, dear Mr. Majorson, with our good wishes."

They went away, and when Majorson looked he found in his hand an unblushing half-crown!

He put it aside to give the secretary at the coming garden fête to be given for that very cause in the grounds of Fulham Palace. He and Terry and Larnaker were all due to go there a few days later. It was a hot and brilliant afternoon.

Now Brother Dan Larnaker, who had the settled conviction that the world would be saved if he was uncomfortable enough, insisted upon going by motor 'bus in the full June afternoon glare. London was crowded, and this plan meant two changes, but Majorson and Terry humoured him, being very fond of him, and knowing from old experience that a person, however nice, with a prominent nose bridge and large larynx, would be miserable if not physically comfortless for a cause.

But after a short ride they suddenly ceased to be sorry they had been dragged by such means, for there below them in the mass of traffic, they recognized Mr. and Mrs. Higgler riding in a donkey cart, or dray, the kind that drops precipitately behind. This perilous

chariot was packed tightly with flowers in pots, and various members of the Higglers family indiscriminately arranged. There were tall fine lilies, their flowering heads carefully wrapped in cones of royal blue paper, the rich pinks, greens and mauves of hydrangeas, the magentas and crimsons of pelargoniums, and the scarlets of geraniums, out of which glowing forest peeped the round dust-coloured heads of little Higglers boys with hair shaved so closely that the pinky white skin could be seen through the stubble.

Mr. Higglers drove, wearing the full coster garb of corduroy and "pearlies," and bore in red-faced steaming silence the horror of a sealskin "flapped" cap and an orange neckerchief with the thermometer at eighty in the shade. But Maggie Higglers wore a regal costume of Royal Reckitt's Blue, emblazoned with yellow lace, and more bead necklaces than would be thought possible to get round one neck. Several diamond combs studded her hair under her enormous white-feathered hat, but as very much of it was encased in metal pins there were large spaces of "parting" between the several kinds of hardware, looking like the rivers on a globe-map. She carried the latest-born Higglers in her arms. Everybody was profoundly serious and very dignified in manner, even the bald little boys.

Emerging from the close, almost stationary traffic of the City, the three spectators thought to lose this resplendent sight, but were astonished to find it continuing with them in the Western direction, to the gradually growing jeers of the populace. As the traffic was still restricted in parts, the costers' cortège came continually under their vision, now getting lost, then turning up again almost under the wheels of the great vehicles.

Arrived at Brompton Road, the remarks of the other drivers became more and more trying at its expense, especially as it now fell in with the usual London season

stream of carriages and motors full of gaily dressed ladies, many of these clearly going to the fête. But the little dray persisted with its quick ready jog, unrecognizing any distinction between itself and the smartest Daimler or the finest pair victoria. They had not lost it when they reached Fulham High Street, and suddenly Larnaker said—

“ I do believe they're going to the Palace ! ”

The others laughed at the idea, yet sure enough as the stream of vehicles turned slowly into the avenue in Fulham Park, Mr. Higgler, family, and donkey turned solemnly in also and became one with the procession.

The packed spectators on either side became speedily humorous though good-natured. But Mr. Higgler was raucous and prompt. He flung unconcerned retorts with great glibness from right to left, never for one instant deigning to turn his head towards his critics. He regarded “ chaff ” as a necessary adjunct to his own progress.

When they reached the lodge gates there was some slight demur, and just then Mrs. Cates and Cara in their motor overtook the Cordwayners without observing them, bold visions of summer finery whirling to triumph. But Mr. Higgler's cart and family blocked up the big gate.

“ Who are these absurd people ? ” Cara called out loudly in her ringing voice. “ What are they doing here ? Hawkins, order them to let us pass ! ”

“ There should be police here to protect people from that sort of thing,” said little Mrs. Cates, much flustered at the delay. “ Who and what are they ? Why are they here at all ? ”

“ We've come here to learn good manners, lydy,” said Mr. Higgler, his eyes on the donkey's ears. “ We've brought our tuppence to pay for a sight of 'ow to be've in good society. I'll give you three-ha'pence of it for yourself, and count it well earned ! ”

"Impudence! Drive on, Hawkins!"

The man started off and the motor cut past the dray at a perilous angle, so rudely near that it knocked off one of the flower-pots, and sent it flying under the wheels of another carriage, and the semi-bald head of a little Higgler boy popped up out of the breach with a hurt and indignant expression.

Majorson coming up just then spoke to the lodge-keeper, who, on his recognizances, permitted the donkey dray to pass in, along the short avenue, and under the big Tudor arch, into the quaint clock-yard, where all the vehicles drew up.

It was full to overflowing of guests' carriages and motors, from which the gay crowds were alighting in their turn, and the entrance of the dray created a sensation, quite unique in its way. Every eye was upon it, and titters went round as it was brought to a standstill in a corner, and Mrs. Higgler, always the spokeswoman, gravely proclaimed their reasons for coming to Majorson. He had sent Larnaker and Terry on into the Palace.

"Good luck me and Mine have had tnis year in flower line, sir," she was saying.

"Likewise in rabbit-skins," put in Mr. Higgler.

"And this being called an East London Offering, and we coming from the Cat and Mutton direction——"

"And rec'lectin' 'im working amongst us down there," put in Mr. Higgler, jerking his thumb in the direction of the Palace at the word "'im."

"We thought we'd bring our little lot, too, to show he ain't forgot, like, it being a 'feet' of flowers and held in his garden——"

"And not knowin' it was a party of lydies not too by-your-leave in their manners, and sitting in their motor-cars like a chamber of 'orrors out for a bank 'oliday," said Mr. Higgler aside to the donkey.

"But here's lilies and roses and geranies and them-



like, fine fat leeks, prize salads, half a dozen rabbits, a bottle of pickles, and six golden guineas in a teapot."

Mrs. Higgler waved her hand in queenly fashion over the treasure, out of which now rose a little dust-coloured Higgler boy, hugging something under his jacket which turned out to be a teapot, a piece of beautiful old lustre ware, bronze and blue in colouring.

Inside it was a packet of paper containing money. Another little baldish boy then produced a fine specimen of the rabbits and held it up to admiration by its hind legs. He had to stand on his own to do so, the animal was so long. A movement of the donkey's shook the cart just as he did so and down he went with the bunny amongst the hydrangeas and lilies, lost but quite resigned, until his father picked him out by the little velvet collar of his coat.

This pantomime was creating immense diversion amongst the new arrivals and a little scorn amongst the grouped men-servants, when the crowd by the big door suddenly swayed aside and parted, and a spare and stately figure in episcopal black was seen to emerge, and cross the yard towards them.

"He is coming," cried Mrs. Higgler, digging her elbows into the ribs of "Mine," and the two little boys' heads rose up open-mouthed from over the mound of leeks and rabbits and lilies, like a couple of small suns rising, and stared breathlessly.

The Bishop's thin, irresistibly human brown face was one twinkle, as he hailed them enthusiastically in a tongue suddenly and curiously adapted to their own. He shook their hands and with a hearty imperiousness, he pulled them from their box-seat, still talking to them, and putting a hand on the arm of each, fairly pushed them across the yard to the Palace and in at the open door, joking as he went.

The little boys stayed with what they called "the moke," guarding the glories of the offering.

The scene on the lawn was immense. Mr. Higglar, scarlet and nervous, but proud as man was never proud before, carrying his lustre teapot in both hands; Mrs. Higglar, stately and handsome, carrying her baby, the glory of her Reckitt's Blue dress making itself almost heard in the great garden full of chiffons and chatter and fashion and beauty. And between the pair, still holding an arm of each, the indescribably enthusiastic face of the Bishop, laughing out to the guests at this triumphant representation of the East for which they were all working.

They made a dramatic and exciting progress to the principal tent, at which the treasurer of the Offering was seated, and the lustre teapot was solemnly presented by Maggie, and a description of the rabbits and hydrangeas outside run in in asides by Mr. Higglar.

Majorson had followed the group, and in the congratulations and merriment of the crowd he had to come up and solemnly hand in Mrs. Alec Cates and Cara's half-crown.

He did manage to do it seriously, but upon emerging from the laughing crush round the costers and the Bishop, he caught sight of the fussy figure of that benevolent lady and the large teeth and flying green scarf of Cara as they stood talking to an unfortunate clerical capture.

"Yes," Mrs. Cates was saying gushingly, "I don't know *how* I should get through all my charity work but for my dear niece. She is such an authority on the East End. She——"

Upon which he basely fled. In the distance the hosts of Miss Finny and Miss Frubbert prowled and prowled around amongst the tents. Flight was absolutely a necessity. Where should he go?

A glimpse of the low-growing rose bushes away beyond through the Tudor arch in the long red wall seemed to call him to them, and he strayed into the

Bishop's fruit-garden and walked between its stiff box borders with his hands behind him, and thought and thought of Nelly. The square grey tower of the old parish church looked into that walled-in, noiseless, old-world spot, fragrant with pinks and scented stocks, and long lines of sweet-pea hedges.

Cloistered and still it lay in the dream of the summer afternoon, like some chantry that the worshippers have left, breathing still of the hush of prayer and the trail of incense.

The kindly blue eyes of the Coster Queen had brought back a train of early memories of the girl they had both befriended in their different ways. And now she had left them both, had risen by his help and her own talent into a world of wealth and frivolity and heartlessness of which to-day, passing through London in the season, though it was only on a 'bus-top, he said he had got glimpses, disheartening glimpses. How could he guard and watch her future? That remained his duty, was more than ever his duty, though she had chosen herself to go out of his immediate care and protection.

The days had grown long and lightless without her. Litany Lane was vacant and hollow without the potent possibility of a vivid face shining along its warehoused greynesses, like a lily-cup in a shadowed room. No laughing breeze face passed the study windows on the way to a lesson. At the Church offices one looked up at the carved oak Lord Mayor's pew in vain. No little puzzled Magdalen crouched there, chin on hands, trying to understand the great mysteries they sang of with sweet set eyes. And across the old flagged courtyard the silence was as death, because no clear, jocund voice rang up the echoes in cascading song. Here he could look at himself dispassionately as he paced in the hallowed steps of bygone Bishops of London, under the trees where they had walked. The distant strains

of the band floating vaguely over into his musings alone recorded any particular year and century. He hardly listened. He let the dreamy place tell him its own low-toned story. The voices of the old dead Bishops spoke across the beds of stocks out of the eternal far away: "We were here for a little space, and then away, onward. We did what we could, we Churchmen, falteringly, failingly, anxiously, courageously, for the others: we tried to bring them the love of God. If we sometimes failed through our humanity, we also triumphed more often and more gloriously by the same token." Broken hints, broken dream-phrases, soft ghosts of suggestion, coming down those long flower-bordered walks, haunted by the spirits of just men made perfect. Over by the dried-up stone well, against the red wall heavy with fig trees, they might almost have been seen, had one looked up in the afternoon hush, walking two by two, those grave old ecclesiastics in their square Tudor dress, noiseless and calm with eternal eyes.

They brought their balm to him, for it was his own humanity that made him suffer now. For, as the warm summer wind came fluffing round him in floating airs, then departed, and returned again laden with the sudden overwhelming sweetness of the stocks, he knew that the thing he had believed to be pity had come back to him laden mightily with love.

\* \* \* \* \*

But on going home Mrs. Cates turned to Cara and said—

"I'm glad we put in an appearance. That is always one's duty, if one is anybody. It's really the appearance that matters. One gets identified with these excellent causes, which is so important. I always remember to put in an appearance."



As she had only, in another sense, put in half a crown, it was fortunate that she had something upon which to congratulate herself.

But Cara was a trifle cross. She had seen the very Mr. Majorson for whose benefit she had learnt up all kinds of hard-and-fast statistics about work in the East, not once, but twice, deliberately make a bee-line for the part of the grounds farthest away from her superior and well-informed self, and she was trying to account for the phenomenon. She was not twenty-eight, but she was already beginning to make bitter remarks about the general contemptibleness of the masculine nature and its unsatisfactory character and tendencies. Here was she, designed by all her relations and her own natural tendency to carry parcels in the rain, for the wife of a cleric, yet on the whole that profession more distinctly than any other fled at her approach. It was curious, and it showed how soullessly unappreciative such men were as a class.

"I think that Mr. Majorson is rather overrated," she said to her aunt. "One hears that he is so successful with social criminals, but actually he knows nothing of the statistics of his own work! I know, because I sounded him. When I ran over a short list that day, he looked quite astounded, and had not a word to say for himself. To-day it was quite clear that he avoided us, because I am a little too much for him." She shook her head proudly. "I know considerably more than he does in his own line. Men never like that. They always resent it. And particularly clergymen, who are always so self-opinionated and over-confident. And, poor men, so limited!"

"I thought you liked them?" said Mrs. Cates wonderingly.

Cara shrugged under her green scarf.

"Social work interests me," she said. "But the Church doesn't really understand social work. I met

such an interesting man to-day in the Trigneys' party. He is something half literary and half artistic, and rather political, and rather sociological, and so deep. He quoted Omar Khayyâm."

"I saw him," said Mrs. Cates crossly. "His boots didn't fit."

"Really, Aunt——"

"Really, Cara. And his collar was flannel, the colour of a duck's egg, and he thumbed everything he touched. I think the Trigneys picked him up abroad, but they are rich soap-boilers, and might be expected to pick up anything."

"Certainly; they met him in Algeria, they said. They were charmed by his knowledge. He is a perfectly wonderful exponent of Eastern ethics and philosophy, I believe. His conversation was most cultured."

"Perhaps. But why were the tops of his boots canvas? And when did he last shave? His chin was like the roller in a musical box. Really, Cara——"

"Really, Aunt, you have no soul, none whatever!"

"Well, at any rate, I have a milliner!" said poor Mrs. Cates, goaded at last to retort. "You never have both together, evidently!"

But from that moment Cara began to conceive faint notions of giving up her interest in Church questions and taking up a "soul"—two quite distinct professions. The long green scarf that she wore to-day was the first ensign of this new departure. It would be followed by a misunderstood expression of face—poor Cara really wore that in the motor this afternoon, unintentionally—and the wearing of very queer, odd-coloured jewellery, the reading of books with deep margins and peculiar bindings, and visits to places on the Continent that nobody else had heard of, and making sketches of them that people wished they had never seen. This stock-in-trade, and a few vague

remarks about the call of the East and the sound of Buddhist prayer gongs, would soon give one's friends an intense impression of one's soulfulness, and incidentally oneself.

In fact, all Cara planned to do was to change her East from Stepney to Sahara. It is often done when men like Maurice Majorson insist upon walking in the opposite direction.

## CHAPTER XVI

"Thou doest almost anticipate my heart :  
It throbbed for thee, and here thou comest ; let me  
Deem that some unknown influence, some sweet oracle  
Communicates between us, though unseen,  
In absence, and attracts us to each other."

BYRON.

"THE Princess is looking younger than ever !"

"Yes. That is the most unmistakable sign that you are getting old in these days."

"True enough. Perennial youth is like optimism, nowadays. It gives you away dreadfully. If one really wants to pass as young in years, one should have all sorts of cynicisms and unsatisfied yearnings, and a liver and rest-cures and what not. My daughter is eighteen, and she has all these, and looks thirty."

"And you look thirty without them—there is the difference. Who would love eighteen ?"

The two guests moved across the lawn in the direction of the royal hostess's seat. The Princess Max was giving a garden party at her country retreat, a cosy Georgian house, wrapped in rook-ridden elms, and hidden by high brick walls with iron spikes on the top. It was on the borders of Kent, not very far from Cobdenmere, and was an easy run down from

town, even for those guests who had no motors and who came by the special train provided for them.

The day was gloriously fine, a day of white fluffy clouds sailing over deep blue skies, a day of warm airs with the scent of hay and roses flinging themselves suddenly across the senses, a day when the far tops of the Princess's elms looked whitish against the intensity of the dome of blue. The distant strains of a band—the Grenadiers—seemed to hum into the murmur of insects and the song of birds, as on the wide, slightly sloping lawn the sheeny, many-coloured dresses of the guests mingled with the banked garden flowers; deep quaint hedges of old-fashioned blossoms and flowing groups of new-fashioned beauties all making one posy together.

The Princess sat, according to custom, on a chair placed within the shade of a cedar, surrounded by the members of the household, and such guests as she chose, after the first formality of greeting, to summon for the special honour of a conversation. To-day the Lion and the Unicorn were kept very busy, it being the Unicorn's duty to go in search of required friends, and the Lion's to patiently offer her chair to them when they came.

The heat and glow of a gorgeous summer had in a way affected the poor Lion. She looked more dead-alive than ever in the sunny, humming warmth all about her, and her costume of mole voile over drab silk, with a remotely receding toque of slate-colour, added nothing of Arcadia to her appearance. The Princess in a white French frock, with the undoubted coquetry of black trimmings arranged with *chic*, was looking remarkably well. She had even so far relaxed the severe formality of her usual appearance as to have added a large crimson rose to her belt. She was surrounded by a court of men.

"Captain Reece," she said, in a moment's pause,



beckoning behind her chair to that unhappy official, "please tell them that I will myself witness the performance of the new dancer in the marquee and will speak to her afterwards."

Captain Reece assented reverentially and started on one of his anxious pilgrimages with promptness. The marquee was some distance from the hostess's seat, and he had to fly through a shrubbery and across two lawns before he reached it. Here he found a little company of entertainers and their assistants busy getting things ready for their performance, being harried by excited servants, and by all the infinite shortcomings of a stage erected on dried grass, under a flapping, heavy, ill-lighted tent. The green-room was composed of a solid thicket of rhododendrons, now in full flower, which grew thickly behind the spot upon which the marquee stood. Captain Reece managed to get hold of a lesser and more frivolous member of the troupe, and to deliver his message.

"Well, I should think she would come and see her herself!" said this gentleman, raising a perspiring blue face from a battle with some small "property" and a tent-peg. "I like that, when all London goes everywhere to see her!"

"Please remember that I am the Princess's emissary," said the Unicorn in an offended voice.

"Her misery? You look it!" murmured the irreverent mime.

Nelly was called from the leafy shades of the green-room, and came billowing forth into the sunshine in a gossamer dress of fairy-like painted chiffon. She was engaged in tugging on a pair of gloves with immense care, and went on with this, raising her bright, dark eyes, and smiling up at him with modest cheeriness. Her natural candour, combined with a now trained and sure refinement, constituted a charm in itself.

The Unicorn thought her slightly flushed face pretty

—he would himself have called it “quite engaging”—as he delivered his message in the courteous but monotonous sing-song of his race. She twinkled up at him respectfully enough, to all outward appearances, and was as gratefully gracious over the Princess’s order as even he could hope to find her. Naturally he did not know that she contemplated “doing” him on some future occasion.

When he had gone the gentleman with pins said—

“Fancy keeping a Misery! The old kings kept fools, I know, to make things lively; but the other way on is what I can’t understand, anyhow. Do you feel bad? Shall I fan you?”

But when the time arrived and the many-coloured guests came flocking into the tent and crammed it, Nelly was in splendid form. The consciousness of the black and white frock of the royal hostess in the front row amongst the fluttering dresses and flower hats gave an extra sparkle and dash to her impersonations. Anything very seriously personal had, of course, to be avoided in such a place and before such an audience, and Nelly’s manager had fallen back on some very exquisite interpretations of well-known historical characters specially prepared for the occasion, and the music specially written for these was singularly dainty and lovely.

The Madame de Pompadour was a triumph of delicate art, of shaded coquetry and old-world grace, and the now famous Nell Gwynne won more than flattering tribute. The Princess asked specially for an East End coster girl, and the dainty person in the painted chiffon frock took the audience by storm in that capacity. “Such imitativeness!” everyone said.

When the performance was over, and the crowd of guests had rustled, scented and eager, for strawberries and cream, out again into the sunlight of the lawns, Nelly had barely time to tidy her hair, and smooth and

cool herself down in front of a mirror fixed among the rhododendrons, when a footman came to conduct her to the Princess's presence.

She obeyed the summons promptly, and found herself conducted to just inside a room by a long window opening direct on to the lawn. Inside the soft shadows of the room the Princess was seated fanning herself and looking up and laughing into the eyes of two gentlemen who stood by her low chair. She always had a ring of gallantry about her. Miss Augusta Malins sat a few paces away staring drearily through space, and Captain Reece guarded the open door, or window.

"Ah, here is our good dancer!" the royal lady cried. "Come in" (she said "Kom"), "I wish that I speak to you, with much thanks."

Nelly entered shyly, and the two gentlemen, lingering a little to get as good a look at her as they dared, moved rather unwillingly aside. She stood with her hands folded in front of her like a schoolgirl, her bright eyes fixed on the royal lady. A few pretty compliments, the phrases rather daintily mixed with German, and then the Princess said—

"Is it not that you are an orphan, yes?"

"I am, Madame."

"And that one pick you up—forgive me, that is the story they tell us—out of the sea?"

Nelly shook her head.

"It was only a muddy gutter, Madame," she said, with the ghost of a twinkle in her shy eyes.

"Hoh! How people exaggerate these things. Well, well, is it not the lily that grows in mud? Her of the water, I mean. So. And tell me, if you mind not, who it was who found you so?"

Nelly hesitated and glanced round to assure herself that no one heard.

"A clergyman, Madame."

"A clergyman? What clergyman?"

“ Mr. Majorson, of St. Simon Cordwayners, Litany Lane.”

The Princess did not answer, she remained very still looking at Nelly, and a slow, soft blush suffused her face, and the agate-colour of her eyes melted to gold. And then a curious thing happened. Nelly, watching her with her own unerring intentness, saw that blush, and read in a quick flash of illumination and wonder what it stood for. The wonder warmed, opened, and spread into her own heart like an expanding flower; with it the blush rose softly and rosily to her own neck and face also, the same shining dilation came to her own wide grey eyes meeting the golden ones of the Princess. The emotion between them met and enveloped them both in a glow of its own. Nelly tried to shake herself free of it. What was she losing her wits about? Might not this great lady mention the Father Abbot that she had defied and teased for so long, whom she had left of her own accord, but she blushed guiltily? And why blush because another paid him that tribute? It was stupid. It was idiotic. If there was anything between the Princess and himself, did that matter to her? How could it matter? He was old, quite old. He must be forty or more. Absurd! Yet she resented that royal blush with vague fear and foreboding. It was one thing to leave him to work out her own way in the world, but he was hers, hers; and she was quite his. She had never questioned that, never for one instant connected him with another woman, much less a rich or great woman. He was the friend of the poor. She had only encountered him with the poor and the workers, whom no one counted as women, at all events in the Nelly category. It seemed horrid and almost treacherous of him to have inspired all this when she knew nothing about it, had never dreamed of such a possibility.

“ Next time that I see Mr. Majorson,” said the Princess — “ for I know him well—I shall thank him for giving



you to us. It is much then that he has done for you ? ”

Nelly glanced at Augusta and the two gentlemen, but they were at the far end of the long Georgian room and out of hearing. She told in a few brief sentences of the training at the Cordwayners' and of her patron's great solicitude for her welfare.

“ You are fortunate indeed,” said the Princess slowly and a little sadly, her eyes travelling across the busy lawn unseeing. “ What a wild, free life, that of the Art ! Like a bird that has no cage, no cage—except what such a man might make for you ! And that would be freedom ! ”

Nelly stood abashed and almost cross, in awed silence. Terry's idea, the Cordwayners' idea, everyone's idea but her own ! They had all thought she ought to be so glad to let the Master Cordwayner rule and order her and her future just as he chose. Even this gracious, sweet-faced royal lady thought so. She herself had alone rebelled, cut herself off from him. Yet was she cut off so much as she thought ? Even now, even here at this sunshiny, gay garden party he dominated her, made her change colour and stand shy and witless before her patron.

A few more questions were asked and answered, and then the Princess signified dismissal, and Nelly bowed herself away and crossed the crowded lawn, still thinking out that puzzle, and hardly noticing the faces that leaned forward staring curiously at her and marking her out as the famous danseuse.

She felt righteously angry. She did not know who with, but her wrath seemed to be between the Princess and Majorson. What was there that they had in common and which she was outside of ? She had been so used always to the aura of his kindness and protection shed over herself, had seen it always so certainly and directly from her own point of view, and as her own

right, that it made her suddenly hot with a kind of resentment to think that others, other women, great, noble ladies, knew him, and appreciated him far more than she had ever done whilst she was with him.

That irritating sense that he regarded her as a child, a useless child, which had been the real deep down cause of her insisting on separating herself from him, now returned to her with double force. He looked upon her with kindness and pity, but of course he must look upon the Princess as a woman, a friend, a conscious, companionable being. She felt all that in the Princess's manner, in certain words of hers: "We are friends, he and I. We have many a long talk together." They could talk together, the great lady and the well-born, experienced priest. It was she who was out of it all, she who was regarded as a strayed and obstinate child. And that when she had made herself a great reputation, that when she was known and sought after in London, that when she was clever, and everyone said she was clever! What was the wide gulf between herself and these ladies still? She made an impatient vow that she would go and see Mr. Majorson directly she had a free moment—back in town. She just wanted to scold him for it.

She left shortly after. She got rather teased by her companion mimes on the way to the station for her unusual silence. It was a two-mile drive along a wide, white-dusted high road whose elm trees gave no shade, and the Princess's victoria was old and springless, and her horses even more so.

The other two girls and two men, who formed a rather famous variety troupe of blameless character, amused themselves by alternately chaffing each other and dragging her into the nonsense.

"Sleepy, dear?" said one of the girls.

"Struck dumb by the nobs," said another.

"Wants to go in for gay societee!" said a man.

"Is planning to nail a lord, like Lottie Lea did!"

"It *would* be luck," said the first girl, "but very boring luck, if you go by what you see at these places."

"Give me Bohemia and my own life to live!" said one man. "I could not stand about in a sweltering sun in a stovepipe hat and a tight coat for three hours at a go. That's slavery. And the Princess is no beauty. Are they ever?"

"Thank the gods we're none of us in the aristocratic line," yawned the other. "It's a dull show."

"Miss Nell's in for it, or she'll know why not!"

"Shut up. She's ratty."

"Remember me, Miss Nell, when you get there, and leave me a few strawberry leaves! I can go without the cream."

"Eh, what's that?" cried the first man, pointing at a placard. "Rottenness of Society, eh? A warning, dear Nell."

The victoria had come to a momentary stop, jammed in by a crowd of motors on the same return journey, and was pressed just outside a wide-fronted wayside inn with a hanging sign and quaint tiled roof, the whole utterly ruined by a big green and gold announcement of a garage, and many bills loosely stuck on to boards decorating its coach-yard palings.

One of these, the ensign of a large semi-local organ of reforming tendencies, announced in chocolate-coloured lettering—

SPEECH BY SIR NIGEL FINROY.

THE ROTTENNESS OF SOCIETY.

"Like that! Who's the idiot?" said one of the men.

"Some local fogey," the other replied and burst into derisive whistling.

Nelly stared at the chocolate letters as though they were living things and could speak. Nigel? Lecturing on social ethics, of all things? Could it be the same?

And yet it was. She remembered the name of Cobdenmere, and that it must be situated down here quite near to the Princess's. Also the death of Sir James and the succession of the title. Still, it did seem incredible.

Up the sloping asphalté footpath to the little country station, when they got out of the carriage, they came across more placards of the same nature, with Nigel's name constantly recurring.

They had a few minutes to wait for the train and stood about on the hot, glaring platform of the country station still chaffing. Nelly became aware of someone watching them very steadily from the waiting-room window, over the blind. She hardly troubled to turn round, being by this time accustomed to such close espionage on her various journeys of business as any public person becomes accustomed, but just as she and her companions were about to get into a second-class carriage together she felt her right arm taken from behind and heard a voice saying hurriedly—

"Please, please! Come in here, first-class, let me beg you!"

She gave a little cry at the voice and glanced round and recognized Nigel Finroy. He kept his hold of her arm, while he looked back pleadingly into her face.

"Let me go!" she said in a voice low with fury. "If you touch me so I shall scream."

He dropped her arm, but said quickly—

"For God's sake don't misunderstand me. I have something to say to you. I am ill. Oh, Nelly."

Now her companions had been unflinching busy with a fire of idle nonsense of their own, over baskets of strawberries, and had not noticed the encounter. The two girls and one man were already in the carriage. The other man turned to look for Nelly and saw the tall, smartly dressed man talking to her in low tones with the train carriage door held open and heard him say the words, "Oh, Nelly!"



This giddy mime, overcome with laughter, tumbled into his own carriage and slammed the door with some noise about that lady's having caught her aristocrat already, and hooray for the peerage, and so on. His careless words sounded out to the others. It was Nigel's moment. Even Nelly could not now wish to have him follow her in amongst such a ribald group, as he certainly would have done, and for very shame she slipped into the first-class compartment with Finroy and the train started.

## CHAPTER XVII

" You loitered on the road, too long  
You trifled at the gate :  
The enchanted dove upon her branch  
Died without a mate.  
The enchanted Princess in her tower  
Slept, died behind the grate."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

FOR a few desperate seconds they remained in the dead silence of seething emotion, Nelly's eyes set level with fury, immovable from the cushions in front of her. Nigel sat by the door furthest away from her, watching her with all his eyes. If she had looked she would have seen him to be wretched, even tragical of mien, the dilation of his large nostrils alone moving in a face struck grey with genuine misery.

But woman-like, her business was to be on the defensive, and such signs mattered nothing to her in the choking sensation of her own resentment. She felt for the first few seconds as though she could have killed him. That being denied her, she could at any rate wound and hurt him.

" Nelly," came his low voice, when the pause became too maddening to be borne.

There was no answer.

"You got my letter?"

She shrugged, but said nothing.

"But you never answered it?"

She turned and looked at his boots only.

"What did you suppose?" she said, and reverted to the window.

"Nelly, I thought after so long a time——"

She interrupted him with a sudden hard laugh.

"Life makes some of us softer," he went on. "Haven't you seen me following you about, watching you from afar as you danced and sang, alone and miserable? That would have melted most women."

"Would it?" she said. "Then that accounts for such creatures as you still being able to crawl about the world and call themselves men."

"I would not have believed that you could have spoken to me, treated me, so cruelly!"

"How was I treated?"

"Ah, I see you feel resentment? Naturally you feel that. But that is why I waited for you at the station and brought you in here; it was to explain. I have wanted to explain. Listen. You see there are things that a man in my position and class is expected to do and to be. It was natural that in those days you could not understand that, and perhaps I didn't altogether myself, but when I have shown you what I mean you will see the reason of my action, and forgive."

"Do the claims of your world matter to me?" she interrupted.

"Perhaps not. But my claims as a man——"

"Do you know," she said, turning for the first time and looking at him full in his white, broad face, "that it's no good you saying these things to me, talking as if you were at least a human being, when I regard you as rather less than a reptile?"

She said it so quietly that it sounded almost amiable, till one realized its meaning.

"But surely—oh, but surely—you can't mean that, Nelly? Oh, no woman's heart——"

"Just take it in. The most creeping, the most slimy, the most hateful thing that crawls and shudders under refuse, things with white eyes and moist, battenning fingers, that cling with cold horror—are nothing to you," she repeated unemotionally. "I regard you as these are regarded, only ten times more loathsome. Now will you stop talking about forgiveness? How can one forgive a white newt?"

She seemed exalted with hatred out of all emotional expression. Her dead fury recoiled on him with almost a physical effect of sickness. He sat staring at her, white and still himself. His eyes gleamed, narrowed, then, unspeakable astonishment, wet themselves with starting moisture. He would have called it tears. He had not believed that any blandishments of his could meet with such a reception as this from any woman in the world. It was horribly apt—"One cannot forgive a white newt." He looked cruelly like the creature of underground, gloom-hidden existence, with the semi-transparent lids sagging over the dull eyes in his face, which had grown pale to opaqueness. His pleading hands, now spread a little after his oratorical habit in a desire to explain the quite unexplainable, added to this effect.

"The things you inherit your life from," Nelly went on dully, "groped under beer barrels in mouldy cellars ages ago and never saw enough daylight to develop their own colours. You've come up from under the beer barrels yourself—you lecture on temperance, now, don't you? But you are still in darkness, of other sorts. The mould has affected your vision."

There was a long silence after that, Finroy still regarding her with what he believed to be pathos.

"You never used to talk so," he said at last, with reproach. "They've taught you to be sarcastic."

They've trained you to be very clever, but they've put an edge on to you that you never had before, Nelly."

"Seeing the world under certain drawbacks will give people all sorts of edges," she replied.

"You must have seen a lot of the world since—since Lisy-sur-mer?"

"Yes, I have. A lot."

"It has made you harder and colder."

"Naturally it would."

"But three times as beautiful. You were hardly pretty then. Now you are entrancing!"

"It sounds like a Press notice. And I suppose that is why you renew the acquaintance?"

Hé gave a sudden forward movement, flinging himself along the seat obliquely, leaning on his elbow on the seat-cushion, his face turned up yearningly to hers. His voice broke.

"I do it because I love you!" he said. "I do it because I am in despair. I didn't know in those old days that I loved you, but now, by God, I do know. I've watched you dance and dance until I'm mad. I'm too mad to care about the things I left you for. I'm throwing everything away—hope, ambition, career, for love of you. Can't you see it? I follow you about. I have to go and hang about in the corners of idiotic drawing-rooms to look at you, and leave all my own interests to just watch you. It'll come to this, that I shall lose everything I've been working for all this time, and all for you, for you, little Nelly."

He tried to take her hand, which she pulled away.

"That's very dramatic," she said. "What are you giving up for me? And how?"

He sat up suddenly, sulking.

"Can't you see? I've gone in for a dashed respectable life, with politics in the future, and social reform, and a lot more rot. A man has to do these things if



he has family traditions, and my people were all keen on them. I've sowed my wild oats, people say, but now they're willing to take me as a leader, now they see me serious and interested in big social questions and all that kind of thing. But, hang it all, you are making me throw it all over again. I think I'm going mad. I can get no peace, and I'm losing my hold on my work, the work I set myself. It's slipping away, slipping away. People will soon begin to point at me."

"Well, you like that. After all, it's an audience, isn't it? You always liked an audience. It's you who ought to be on the stage, not I. So long as someone either hissed or clapped you'd be happy."

She was regaining her serenity as his feeblenesses unfolded themselves to her. All that she had suffered through him in the past sank into oblivion beside the spectacle of his transcendent idiocy and love of theatrical sensation. In the old days she had been too young, too inexperienced in the ways of "gentlemen" to realize more of him than his own relation to her and the wrong she had suffered. But in the light of her nearly three years of training it was easy enough to see him for what he was; not merely libertine, but *poseur*, snob, and humbug. It tickled her fancy to watch him, with a view to future caricature, and in this spirit she led him on mockingly, allowing him to ramble on with his explanations till they arrived at Victoria, where she prepared to swiftly dismiss him.

"Have no fear, I shall not force my presence on you," he said dramatically, as they emerged from the grey station into the chaos of cabs and 'buses. "I have an appointment to consult a specialist."

His eyes sought hers in hushed solemnity, but found no answering concern, only contempt written there.

"I am due in Wimpole Street now," he said. "I

don't know what the verdict may or may not be—I have something seriously wrong, they say—it may be life or death.”

“It doesn't interest me in the least,” she said, getting into her cab.

“But, Nelly, this is not the end, now we have broken the ice? I may see you? You will let me call? There is still so much to explain. Much hangs on this man's verdict. If it is a death sentence——”

He had clutched her hand over the cab apron, and was gazing up at her appealingly. As he paused on the word “death,” the dull, low-toned whiteness of his face, the hollowed heaviness of his eyes really struck her for the first time as indicating some physical disorder. It was not all a pose, then? And yet how ridiculously he put it! A death sentence! So ultra-dramatic, even over a matter that from his queer, livid look might really be serious.

“I see. If it should be death you'll call,” she said mockingly, pulling away her hand.

“You little know the truth of your words,” he replied in sudden wrath. “You have said it. I can stand your scorn now—because I know of things you little dream of. But one of these days——”

She said, “Happily at all events you don't know my address for one,” and told the man to drive on abruptly.

He was left standing on the kerb looking pathetic and furious at the same time, as whipped dogs will sometimes look. She breathed freely when she turned the corner into Victoria Street and so cut the statue of Tragedy out of her vision, but she was angrier than she had pretended, and her heart was beating high with mingled triumph and hatred as she drove along the crowded street, between the high, looming buildings.

The triumph was that obvious and quite heathen

one for which she had worked, the power to hurt him and even spurn him. She had done so sooner and more easily than she could have dreamed. Why, he had nearly cried in the train! And all that pose about the specialists! Lots of men went to specialists when their world found them out.

She looked at her watch and directed the cabman to drive to Litany Lane. She had a late evening engagement to fulfil, but there were several hours to spare between now and then. She must see Majorson. Partly because of the sting the Princess's words had caused her and to satisfy some sense of vague disturbance, and partly to tell him about Nigel. She felt that he ought to know. Hitherto she had not told him of Nigel's attendances at some of the places where she played and acted. She was afraid of some restriction or difficulty that he might, in his high-handed way, make about the matter.

But after this he must be told. He would expect it, and it was only fair to him.

The City looked very baked and arid and "used up" after the lawns and lanes of Kent, and the crowds had the usual weary-faced look of summer in town. She did not remember till they drew up in narrow, grey-walled Litany Lane how oddly gay she must look coming straight on here from a Princess's party, and dressed in the finery thereof. She found herself floating and frou-frouing up Majorson's monastic stairs and into that familiar panelled study with the first sense of strangeness and incongruity that she had ever felt within its homely ecclesiastical shades.

Majorson entered from a door at the other end of the room just as she was announced as "a lady to see you, sir." He was looking jaded and tired, and his head was held a little lower than of old. He seemed to feel the heat more than usual. Some of the street dust was on the shoulders of his black coat—he had

just come in from parochial labours—and his olive face was paler in tint. He gave a start of surprise at seeing her, and crossed the room to greet her with hands outheld, enclosing her own in the old, dear way.

"Why, what a vision!" he said. "I had no idea of seeing such a fairy being in this dusty place. Where did you float from?"

"The Princess's garden-party," she laughed.

"But that's in Kent?"

"Yes, I know, but I had to return early. I'm due at Lady Kinderwick's affair to-night. So I just ran over to see you in between things."

He stood surveying her, his eyes twinkling a question.

"You've left me alone for over a fortnight, haven't you? I know what it is—you wanted to show me that dress!"

"No, indeed, I forgot the dress," she said, shaking the chifions like apple-blossoms in a breeze. "It was only something I wanted to tell you—I ought to tell you, I think."

His face became graver.

"Yes?" he said. "Something to confess?"

"No, Father. It isn't my fault at all. It's hateful, horrid, but—well, I suppose it had to happen sooner or later."

He turned his back to her and fingered something on the mantelpiece. "Do you mean a lover?" he said rather quietly.

"Yes—no. What was," she answered.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"Say out, then."

"Nigel—I've seen him."

He wheeled round quickly. "Where?"

"At the station, coming from the Princess's. I suppose he knew I should be there, and he lives near.



He got into the same train, forced himself on me. It isn't the first time I've seen him—he often has been in my audience at the backs of crowds—but the first that he has spoken to me. Dared to speak to me ! ”

His face had changed from the almost tender delight of seeing her to a hard grimness. His eyes, robbed of their habitual shrewd twinkle, had the steely fierceness that they had worn in that memorable interview with Nigel. From the indulgent humorous parish priest he had suddenly become the judge, the inquisitor. Nelly saw all the difference, and her heart leapt at it. It was so like him—half boy, half pontiff, and so easily changed from the one to the other.

“ What had he to say ? ” he asked, the contempt curt in his tones.

“ Explanations. He tried to make them, that is. ”

“ I have no doubt. And what did you say ? ”

“ I was as horrid as I could be, honestly. ”

“ Did you yield one inch ? ” The hard eyes seemed to search her through and through. She tossed her head and laughed.

“ Why, now, is it likely ? ”

“ I insist upon knowing. ”

“ Oh, very well. No. I made fun of him to the last. I left him saying tragically that he was going to a specialist, being in danger of dying, or something. ”

“ Yes, I can imagine it. A very old trick indeed. Now look here, ” he was standing in front of her, very close, so as to see her face : he now took her two hands and held them down squarely at her sides in a tight grip. “ Why did he speak to you at all ? ”

“ I told you. He said he must explain. ”

“ Yes, but why ? Because you are now famous, and he feels a little small ? ”

“ I don't think so. Well, it may be half that. But I think he imagines—he now cares for me again. ”

“ That is what I wanted to get at. And I suppose

he—imagines—that you may be ready to change too ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Perhaps he will want to marry you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Do you think that ? ”

“ I gather it from some of the muddly things he said.”

“ And do you suppose I shall let you ? ”

“ Father ! ” she gave a sharp little cry, and was silent a minute, her hands still held in his. Then she added, more low, “ Do you really suppose that I should consent to ? ”

“ That I am finding out for the first time. We have never spoken of this subject, you and I. I have reared you and trained you to what you are. But you are a woman now, a little woman of the big professional world,” he paused a moment, surveying her with playful, half-shut eyes, still holding her, “ a beautiful little woman. I hope I am a good enough priest to know that there were limitations to reading your thoughts. I hope I know enough of women to know that I know nothing.”

Her eyes wavered, the colour rose and fell, and rose again on her cheeks, at a confused rush of those very thoughts he said he could not read. But she said she blushed at the recollection of the Princess’s emotion, and raised her eyes again quickly to his face and studied it with that queer critical frankness. She seemed to see its long olive lines with new eyes. So this was what great women of the big world, as well as men, felt such devotion for ? This tired-faced, thin, brown, eager man with that extraordinary unmistakable stamp of the ecclesiastic on every feature, that cut of conscious authority which she had come to associate with his rightful guardianship of her. That she must love him was natural, for he fought her battles for her,

but it seemed to-day that everyone joined her in yielding to him.

"Then you would not consent?"

"I would die rather."

He dropped her hands and moved away with sudden carelessness. "I'm glad of that, for now we need not argue over it. I should never let you," he said coolly.

"I suppose I am free to choose?"

"No, you are not. There is Simon. Anything for his good you would have to do. But this would not be for his good."

"Have to! Have to!" she said, laughing consciously and picking up her things, gloves and boa and chain purse and such trifles, preparatory to going. "Who could make me do anything unless I wanted?"

"I could," he replied quietly. "I could, and will make you do your duty, now and at all times."

"And you will decide what the duty is too, I suppose?"

"That also is my promise," he replied, turning his face a little away to hide the twinkle in his eyes.

He could not guess how soon he must decide both these questions.

*BOOK III*

## CHAPTER XVIII

"Our deeds are like children born to us: they live and act apart from our own will. Children may be strangled, but deeds never."—GEORGE ELIOT.

COBDENMERE was in a chaos of excitement. All her streets were flooded with strange vehicles, her rural traffic disorganized.

That is to say that, instead of the usual brick-carts, the drowsy brewers' drays, the farmers' and hop-pickers' shaky, old-fashioned gigs, motors covered with posters tore and shook the place, and crammed into the narrow cobbled by-ways in contradiction to their usual custom of scudding haughtily past on the white high road that skirted the little town.

They were filled with men wearing hats at weird angles, puffy and persuasive of face and giving out many handbills and more promises, in the October sunshine.

Cobdenmere was in the throes of the eight days before an election. The death of the member had brought about a by-election—old High and Dry Tory Bagley, who offered you heavy port at all hours, swore like a trooper, kicked and pensioned all his servants, rode to hounds, thought the Catechism was invented to enforce class distinctions, and went to the parish church and snored about twice a year on the principle of paying an afternoon call on heaven.

He had now gone under the slabbed cenotaph of his forefathers to stand before the bar of judgment on at



least the charge of having lived, if too well ; of having had a good round, warm-blooded list of Victorian vices—which, by the by, were Georgian virtues, so wags fashion—instead of the modern list of cranks, negations, and anti-humanities.

But Cobdenmere was tired of him. It had changed, and it wanted a change. Its population had altered from the small hop-farmers of thirty and forty years ago to the industrial dwellers in rows and rows of little drab streets all exactly alike, each house with an india-rubber plant in the front window and a milk-can on the doorstep. Almost every third street with a provision dealer's at the corner, with the house sides painted a glaring colour to advertise respectively somebody's mustard or somebody's blue.

The red tiles and Elizabethan chimneys on the Green Dragon Inn seemed to be the last things left of the past—the sporting, old Mr. Bagley past. They and he had been of the same warmly mellow tint. But now an appalling spiritual and mental drabness, the raw hideousness of a crank propaganda, was showing itself in the very architecture of the place.

And the new party was for reform. It was strong in numbers, in local wealth, in local eloquence. All it had needed, hitherto, was to nominate a leader of which it need not be jealous, and now it had found one in a young man of property and of tradition in line with its own, the young and promising owner of Cobdenmere.

His father's name was largely in his favour, but apart from that his very position put him out of the range of the jealousy, say, of the owners of the provision shops, and his style of speaking and declaring himself being noisy and ambiguous, but not necessarily truthful, was immensely in his favour.

What was against him was balanced by a now rather generally accepted legend that he had been obliged to separate from his aristocratic wife because she drank.

And as total abstinence was the party cry of his would-be constituents, this story, combined with Nigel's own air of interesting melancholy, was a powerful lever in his favour. The question of divorce was not a thing to deeply trouble such a group. In all things they were for "reform," and an upheaval, even of the marriage laws, was better to their minds than keeping to any existing order or convention. And so Nigel stood nominated as their candidate.

The sun, catching to a blaze the copper-beeches in old Mr. Bagley's huge, wide-lawned garden, did not turn pale at the immensity of this lie. The sleepy pigeons still browsed and brooded in the golden autumn sunshine on the mellow tiles of the "Green Dragon" roof, and the late hollyhocks stood in flaming rows along the wall of its bowling-green as serenely as their successors would do in far Octobers to come, when the passions and falsities of the shouting crowds in those motor-shaken streets should be no more, even in men's memory.

He and his friends were working hard, and had been working for weeks. His days were a rush of canvassing and entertaining. He had forgotten everything in the wild excitement of the fray, forgotten Nelly and her refusal, forgotten the past or his recent fears. He would win himself this office and dignity, and defy the world which—the notion was his own—had failed him disgustingly.

It was the third day since the nomination, and the agents and friends of his club and party were more than hopeful of the result, they were morally certain of it. Its end was a foregone conclusion.

He and Blagdon were motoring about doing a house-to-house canvass. Blagdon was laughing and crowing over the certainty, and the tape in his mouth seemed to have been loosened for the occasion. One could almost perceive the ends flying in company with the windmill bows.

"Stay, here's Hobbs," he said, breaking off his talk and pointing to a hatless young man who came hurrying towards them along the main street, signalling as he cantered and waving a packet of letters. Hobbs was Nigel's private secretary.

"I thought I'd find you in the village, Sir Nigel," he cried, as he came up panting. "The post has just brought these—one seems important by the superscription."

"Very private too," sniggered Blagdon, seeing that word written across the top of the envelope in the rather black masculine hand of the writer.

Nigel took it and turned it over, recognized the writing, also the hint in Blagdon's tapy smile.

"It's from the family parson!" he said. "Thanks, Hobbs," and thrust the letter into his pocket. A sudden instinct of self-defence made him delay the opening of it, sitting there in a motor, the centre of a staring crowd.

"I didn't know you had one!" said Blagdon, as they started off again.

"Didn't you? I wish I didn't!" Nigel's face was betraying him, as usual. His eyes were fixed on the white, motor-dusted hedges and his fair brows were knitted into a frown of perplexity and sudden fear. What could Majorson have to say to him now after these years of dead silence? There would be no use in his lecturing him in his dashed priestly fashion at this stage, especially as Nelly herself would have nothing to say to him. If he thought he was going to come his Popish Church notions over him now, he was jolly mistaken, that was all. How like such a fellow to choose such a time for his beastly preaching! Well, let him preach.

He had almost a mind to tear up the letter without reading it. There could be nothing in it that really mattered, and it was a horrid shadow of a past connection that he had no intention of renewing.

Blagdon noticed his silence, and he knew it. You always had to be on your guard against Blagdon's personal suspicions of your secret complicity in something disgraceful. He seemed to sit on a hedge watching for the slips of the passers-by, just as an ordinary social attitude.

"Save me from a Ritualist!" Nigel said lightly. "I have quarrelled with this good gentleman before now, I can tell you. 'Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?'—one wouldn't be sorry to find a FitzUrse to make himself useful by taking on the job! I'm afraid I'm too out-and-out a Protestant to have any patience with him."

The notion of Nigel as a Protestant would have been funny to anyone but himself and Blagdon. They, however, took it calmly, one because he always believed just what he said at the moment, and the other because he never believed anybody or anything at all. It did not, therefore, strike either of them as comic.

"These fellows take too much upon themselves," Nigel went on, as the motor spun between the low yellowish hedges and acres of fruit-farms, endless short apple and plum trees planted in long lines with geometrical exactness, fallow now, and cleared of their crops. "The everlasting tyranny of priestcraft. It's always lurking there behind such fellows' smoothest words. They're all secretly working underground to get a hold over the liberty of Englishmen."

"Ah! Tyranny, tyranny!" said Blagdon.

"This fellow kept pretty quiet till he got hold of a living through the influence of my late father," Nigel went on. "Since then he's behaved disgustingly. Taken upon himself, if you please, to try and lord it over me in a way no man of spirit could stand! I've been obliged to cut him for the last year or two. His pretensions are intolerable."

"We are looking for disestablishment," said Blagdon;



"at an early date now. Then these gentry will have to sing a lower tune, I fancy! Down they shall go, as low as the Lords! As a nation we will have freedom of conscience, now or never. Virtue by Act of Parliament is the only true road to freedom."

"That's it," said Nigel, glad of the phrase. "Freedom of conscience, that's what I want to see."

He did not realize that what he really needed at that time was the conscience, not the freedom. To ask for liberty for a thing you do not possess has its humorous side.

They were now passing the outer wall of one of the large outlying hop-farms that lay east of Cobdenmere but within its parochial boundary, a low, rambling stone building, half hidden in clustering red-tiled oast-houses, and surrounded by fields of ranked hop-poles, bared now for the winter. Just beyond it a totally new terrace of little yellow brick houses started up in a line of glaring hideousness, blatant and raw to the roadway. It was here they had to call—the hop-farm would have meant love's labour lost in their case—and the motor slowed up and stopped before reaching them, as the road narrowed in their immediate vicinity. Behind them mean lines of clothes hanging out to dry made a dreary wet drapery.

Blagdon got out, saying :

"I'll just go and butter a few of them up—the ladies! The men are all away at the works in Rochester at this hour. Evidently it's washing-day, and the dames won't be too pleased if you're rushed straight in on to them, Sir Nigel. A moment, if you don't mind waiting here."

He minced away, leaving the other in the motor. Directly his back was turned Nigel pulled Majorson's letter out of his pocket, slit it open, and began to read. As he did so his body seemed to half fall or slip gradually lower and lower in the cushioned seat, and his eyes to stare immovably at the blue page fluttering in his

hand. A stray wind came along and shook the paper, but Nigel made no sign, so that the chauffeur did not even turn round, and Blagdon saw nothing, being busy with the tinny knockers of the yellow terrace. Majorson wrote :—

“ DEAR FINROY,

“ I read to-day for the first time of your nomination to the candidature for Cobdenmere, and I write to inform you of one thing which immediately concerns you, and which it is only just that you should know before taking the final step. You will recollect the full circumstances of all that passed between us exactly three years ago. I need not remind you of your charge to me. Also I believe I need not tell you that I then undertook it fully, and that what I prophesied in my note to you with regard to Elinor Lovekyn has now come true. That you know for yourself. What I have to tell you now is that a son was born to you on the first of August in the following year. That he lives, and is being properly brought up in the Orphanage of a Sisterhood affiliated to this church under the name of Simon Lovekyn.

“ This fact may or may not affect your future plans, but I must warn you that, since you constituted me Miss Lovekyn’s guardian, I refuse to allow her to be communicated with on this matter except through myself.

“ Yours very truly,

“ MAURICE HEBER MAJORSON.”

“ A son was born to you on the first of August in the following year,” that sentence alone seemed to race and swim before Nigel’s fixed, expressionless eyes. A son. And they had never told him ! He lay back in his seat stunned and breathless, almost in tears. So utterly overturned and struck was he that he could have burst

out and cried like a child. He had to hold tightly on to the leather arms of his seat to prevent himself from calling out, splashing into the full expression of his always impulsive emotion. A little boy. A little boy. It caught at his heart and almost stopped its beating.

Like many quite animal, sensuous, emotional men, Nigel was fond of children, fond of the mere idea of children, fond of them as he liked little terrier dogs and jolly little beagle packs. The first tidings of parenthood to such a man would be overwhelming. Phillippa had had no family. That had always been scored against her. But this——

"A son was born to you." "Now in the Orphanage under the name of Simon Lovekyn." Those two sentences kept ringing on. As he sat still and stared at the long, tapering vistas of hop-poles stretching away into what looked like infinite distances, great unending aisles of thin barked wood, his mind was staggered by the thought of a fearfully changed vista of his own future. He forgot Blagdon and the election. Everything was blank, chaotic to him save one fierce duty to be done, one unutterable, desperate necessity. The hop vistas seemed part of it. He alone knew what it was.

When the mellifluous voice of Blagdon broke upon his ear, he neither turned nor answered. It seemed too remote.

"Will you follow me now, Sir Nigel?" the man repeated, his little light eyes critical and watchful as ever.

"O yes, let's be getting home," Finroy replied, mechanically folding up the sheet of blue paper and crushing it into the breast pocket of his motor-coat.

Blagdon stood peering and smiling, a pinch on his mean, smug features. A thin, red hen by the roadside, picking about amongst the weedy goosewort and ragged thistle that decorated it, came and raised her head, and peeped about with her sharp, red eyes,

exactly side by side with him. She too seemed to have business with Sir Nigel Finroy. Curiously enough, as they stood so, they looked ridiculously alike, equally sandy, equally curious, equally mean.

"They are all waiting to see you," persisted the mystified Blagdon.

"Who? What?"

Nigel looked up. The present and its claim was returning to him. He stared up now at the yellow brick terrace, and noted the several heads of ladies hastily called from a day's washing, peeping out of the tiny front doors, in a bobbing line. Dimly it reminded him of the scene in *Ali Baba*, where the robbers look out of the jars at Morgiana, all in a row.

He felt as suddenly furious with these poor swayers of the local vote as though they had been robbers themselves and in need of the punitive boiling oil. Why were they all staring at him so?

"Come," said Blagdon, unfastening the rug. He had to get down in a dream. He had to go from house to house repeating the old electioneering phrases, the old promises, semi-consciously, in a staring dream. He must have looked unutterably foolish. The poor, called from their dull tasks to talk to a gentleman who solicits them for anything, are very critical. These short-figured, long-headed Kentish women thought Sir Nigel Finroy a fine specimen of a ninny, and heard his stilted, half-uttered electioneering remarks in cold silence. Only one, who carried a baby boy bunched up against her shoulder, thought him the nicest of gentlemen imaginable, for he laid his hand on the child's head, saying in a dull, hollow voice—

"How old is he?"

"Two years," she replied.

"Two years. Good God!" was his answer, but he remained looking closely at the little white-haired peasant with his hand still on the fluffy head.



When Blagdon got him away he sank back in the motor without a word, and as they neared Cobdenmere he roused himself to say that he must go up to town to-night, on important business.

"Ah? Family affairs?" said Blagdon.

"Yes," said Nigel. "Family affairs," unconscious of the irony.

"You'll be back early to-morrow? It is important that you should."

"All right. I'll see to everything, no fear."

He went up to town still in that dream. He drove from Victoria to the City, without seeing the contrast of the lighted streets and pinky sky, such as had prevailed another and momentous October. In the grey desert of warehouses, the whitish grey stone of the church shone out in the autumnal gloaming. There were lights in the Vicarage.

He alighted and was shown in at once to the panelled study on the first floor. Majorson was wearing a cassock, and was writing hard at a mahogany table-desk under one shaded light, but the blinds were not yet down, and the streak of dying pink sky still gleamed over the roofs and chimney-shafts beyond.

The Master Cordwayner put down his pen and looked up at his visitor in sheer astonishment; then rose sharply. Of all things he had not expected a call. They made no greeting.

Nigel rather weakly and rather theatrically held out the folded letter and pointed to it with a hand that was not too steady.

"What is it you say here?" he asked hoarsely.

"The truth."

Majorson's voice was sharp and solemn. The change in Nigel was something he was not prepared for. He had last seen him gay, debonair, and insolent in the sunny courtyard that would-be wedding-day. He now stood before him white to the lips, hollow-eyed, and

staring. In the confused double light of reading-lamp and fading sky he seemed wraith-like, looming out from the sepia shadows of the panelled room, looking curiously like that New Gallery portrait after Pitt.

"I've come," said Nigel, "to see—the child."

"What do you mean to do?" Majorson stuck his hands in his cassock pockets obstinately. "Remember you put—them both—in my charge."

"I know that. You shall hear what I mean to do in good time. But I want to see him. I've a right to ask that. I've never seen him."

Something a trifle pathetic, a hint of pleading in the tone or manner, touched Majorson in spite of himself.

"Very well," he said shortly, and rang the bell. To Brother Jalfin he gave directions for baby Simon to be brought in from the orphanage.

"But he's gone to bed by this time, Vicar, or going," said the little man.

"No matter. Ask the Mother Superior to let the nurse bring him across."

Jalfin departed, commenting as usual.

Nigel spoke when he had gone, asking a few short questions about the past, and getting as short replies. He sat down by the table, his head bent down. Majorson stood with his back to the fire-place, looking at him steadily.

Presently there came a tap at the door, and Majorson went quickly and took from the arms of a white-capped nurse a curled-up bundle of grey shawls.

"He's half asleep, Vicar," she said deprecatingly. "The shawl was only put on to carry him across."

She removed it and went, shutting the door after her.

The Master Cordwayner approached slowly, whispering softly to the curled thing lying up close against him, its dark woolly head tucked away under his shaven cheek. The boy was wearing a long flannel

nightdress that fitted into the curves of his lovely little clinging shape, and his two pretty feet and one dimpled hand outspread showed up against the blackness of the priest's cassock. They looked like the pictures of St. Anthony of Padua with the Holy Infant held to his breast.

When he got close to the lamp he gave the child a purred kiss and some familiar pet word which seemed to wake him at once. Simon raised his fluffy head and turned his little body half round to Nigel, but the light was too much for him, and he rammed both soft fists into his eyes for a second, hiding his face from that watching one bent towards him, turned to him yet hidden.

Then the fists rubbed, fluttered, released themselves, and remained poised upon each side of the child's face, and with that sudden divine transition from sleepiness into curiosity the lovely thing leant back so and studied the face of his father with the intent dark eyes of Nelly.

Nigel stood transfixed. It was his own portrait in a miniature that had belonged to his dead mother away at Cobdenmere, all but the eyes and the darker colouring. The slightly broad cut of the features were his, the full, petulant mouth, the defined cheek-bones, the broad brow, the rather haughty carriage of the head. It was the Finroy face. It was Reynolds's "Infant Samuel" come to life, with his own features, the stamp of himself and his personality, that most solemn of mysteries, all over its beautiful being.

With a muffled cry Nigel dropped his head upon its soft knees, against the flannel nightgown. He might have said "Forgive me," so abject was the action. It frightened the but half-aroused child, and he turned to Majorson, throwing his tiny arms convulsively round his neck, crying frenziedly, and knocking off his biretta in a sudden storm of terror.

His cries broke up the scene. The nurse came to the door and took him with soothing words, and Majorson closed and locked it and came back to the table, picking up his cap. Nigel had fallen in a chair against it, his head dropped on his hands, staring into the corner shadows.

Majorson stood over him in silence for a few seconds. "Good God, if I had seen him before!" Nigel ejaculated at last.

"Now you have seen him," Majorson said, "shall you go on with that lie?"

Nigel half raised his head, then dropped it again.

"I give up the lie," he said, his voice hoarse and shaken. "I will withdraw from the nomination to-night. I will do justice. That's what I came for."

"What justice?" said Majorson, breathlessly alert. Nelly must have his protection now or never. She should be free.

"What I swear before God I always meant to do," said Nigel, raising his head, but his eyes cast down heavily. "I will tell Nelly the truth. I confess it to you now."

"The truth! What truth?"

"That I married her legally. She is my wife, and that child my lawful heir."

"What?" Majorson came near as if to seize him.

"Before Heaven, Majorson, it's true."

Nigel rose quickly and took a paper from the breast of his coat with a trembling hand. He held it out, with drooping, fallen head.

"See!" he said. "There is the registrar's certificate. Nelly is, and was from the day my father died, Lady Finroy. Her child will be Sir Simon. Before God, Majorson, it is true, and before you I—repent—in ashes—and misery."



## CHAPTER XIX

"One who is born with such congenital incapacity that nothing can make a gentleman of him, is entitled, not to our wrath, but to our profoundest sympathy."

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

MAD, almost ludicrous, almost boyish as the statement sounded, it was true enough.

Majorson examined the paper with blanching brown face and almost unseeing eyes, but when he did gradually get his focus he found the thing read straight. There were the names and dates quite clearly writ—Nigel Majorson Finroy and Elinor Lovekyn—the signature of the registrar and witnesses and all the necessary seals and legends.

He raised his face from it after a long perusal and looked at Nigel. That sinner stood in the correct stage attitude of a prisoner at the bar, head thrown back, white face dim in the crossed, fading light, hands folded before him, ready for any sentence. Majorson, with all the unutterable wrongs of Nelly and the child—not to mention his own—heavy upon him, was suddenly struck by the appalling irritation of this pose. He forgot to be clerical. His lips barely parted to say "You fool!" profoundly, and were then silent, steady, with the long look.

He ought to have said "You sinner." Yet all that struck him in that first second or two was the unspeakable idiocy of the creature before him.

"Why men like you come into this world," he whispered on, pushing away the certificate, "I'm blest if I know, unless it's to give the rest of us work to do. You think you are in a book—you play tricks with the

eternal solemnities of life as lightly as though you thought this world was a penny novelette! You are so engaged with your own capricious poses that you never see the tragedy they bring to other people—you go through life like a fool on a circus chariot, mouthing and acting in spangles for the crowd to applaud, while under the wheels the bodies of women and children lie bleeding in the dust.”

After this gorgeous simile, flung out of the first heat of indignation, Majorson was silent. Nigel said nothing. He was beginning to recover his confidence. Was he not now the noble martyr, who bore all contumely in silence, and so stood with folded hands and inclined head before his accuser?

He even began to feel that he was rather fine already.

“Of course I shall take this to have it examined,” said Majorson, tapping the certificate which he had picked up and folded carefully. “I shall also go to Somerset House and see the entries, to be sure there’s no babyish trickery even now. I shall also see the Bishop, and possibly consult a lawyer. Meanwhile, not a word to Nelly! You understand?”

Nigel nodded resignedly.

“And now tell me—why did you write me that letter expressly stating that you didn’t take the civil form? I’ve got it here, locked in this desk. Why?”

“We quarrelled,” said Nigel in a low, surly voice, “Nelly and I. I meant to throw the whole thing up, have done with it.”

“Why?”

“Well, of course she was a common little thing then. She’s different now, of course. I’d only married her for a wager, and to spite Maudie and Phillipa. Great Scott, Majorson, how are parsons like you to understand the temptations of men of the world? Rotten for you to try.”

"Quite so. Now tell me how was she 'common'?"

"How? You know she was common, a little East Ender drifted into a gutter-life! What else was she likely to be? Out there—at Lisy, I mean—she made a fool of herself; danced and hopped about in front of the French froggies and made no end of talk. Got me talked about. That wouldn't have mattered at one time, of course, but then came the gov'nor's illness, and of course the gov'nor's illness altered everything. Then came his death. That made all the difference at once. There was the title. A man has to think a bit of his class, and one thought of Cobdenmere, and what one's own set would do with such a savage. She was out of all bounds."

"Or always in them," said Majorson, contracting his odd brow. "Well, so you couldn't face the county with her?"

"Frankly, no. I couldn't. You're not a fellow with a beastly family tradition to keep up, or you'd understand, Majorson."

"I'm glad, then, I am without tradition," said Majorson.

"After all," Finroy went on, "it didn't matter one way or another to such a girl. She didn't know she was really married. I rotted a good deal over it, and pretended that it was only half done, or that it didn't really count, and so on. She was as ignorant of law as a kid; too ignorant for the trick to really affect her much. She thought the divorce made some sort of difference to it, as a binding thing. Well, I just let her. She was showing herself rather a little fool. Her ways weren't my ways, naturally. She used the wrong forks and things at table, and after a time that bores a man. And she wouldn't learn. She turned obstinate. She is obstinate. (Majorson nodded.) When I tried to pull her up a bit she got silly. She swore she would always go on dancing and carrying on just the same,

wherever I took her, so we had a scene, and—well, I got out of it. I had to.”

“Thanks. Very lucid indeed. And so you wrote me that—invention—to confirm the breach?”

“Look here, Majorson, I wrote you that letter because I’m not quite a heartless brute. I knew you, with all your parson’s notions about rescues and wandering sheep and missions, and that sort of thing, wouldn’t let the miserable little thing go quite to pieces. You’d send some Bible womān, or someone, to hunt her out. It gave her a chance. It cleared my conscience anyhow.”

“Did it really?” said Majorson. “That’s very interesting. But how did you dare to put her on to me at such a stage? Weren’t you afraid that the trick might leak out? Even she might have talked.”

“She couldn’t. She didn’t know anything. Besides, she hated me by that time. She would have drowned herself rather than come back to me. I knew that.”

Majorson stopped his pacing and looked at him.

“By the by,” he said slowly, “I wonder if you know it now? I haven’t yet grasped what you propose to do, but I am convinced that she is still in the same mind as that.”

Finroy was silent.

“Three years’ desertion was hardly likely to alter such a condition, was it?” Majorson went on. “She has suffered horribly. The knowledge of the world that she has since learnt has taught her also the meaning of such a start in it. It has embittered and hardened her, stunted her growth in the gentleness that other women flower with naturally. You will have all that to reckon with. I warn you. It’s only fair to do so.”

“I know she hates me still,” Nigel said slowly. “And I suppose I have deserved it—from her point of view,” he added deprecatingly, as if, of course, only his really counted in the scale of things. “But I can’t do more



than I've done to-night. I came up to do justice to the boy, Majorson. I'll go back now to an hotel (he mentioned one not far from the City), and I'll spend the night writing to the Association and Blagdon and the constituents resigning all claims to stand for them. I can put it on to health, easily. I had to see a specialist in the summer. He let me off then for a time, but I shall have to go to him again shortly. They say there's something growing. I swear it's not a sham. I've been ill, on and off, ever since I last saw you."

He certainly looked it to-night. Even Majorson, amazed and shaken as he was, was caught by the sincerity of this, at least, of poor Nigel's professions. The curious hint of his reliance upon himself, as the stronger nature, was growing in depth also. To-night for the first time in his selfish life Nigel had made a confession, without the formalities perhaps, but none the less genuine. If it was only to the Master Cordwayner and not to his God, it was a better thing than his old excuses.

But Majorson knew that he had himself to struggle with now, in order to do his priestly duty of helping even this weak, boastful, wandering creature to better things. He bade him good-night with the best kindness he could, and said a few short words to him about his duty to make reparation, the nearest that one could approach to a penance at this stage.

But that night in the Cordwayners' Chapel he had a hard wrestle. If this were true the future loomed before himself with harder duties than any Nigel had to perform. Silently, without any word, he must part from the two creatures who had been in his care, his alone, since the day he found the helpless and deserted Nelly on the beach at Lisy.

He must give up the human hold of her destinies—that warm, beautiful tie of father-protector, friend and teacher, that he had loved so deeply and so long,

that had become an intense and daily necessity ; the warm glowing fuel for that happiness which men who give most want most.

A darling bond, that ruling of a growing, clinging life, that making of a beautiful woman, as it were. For as he had prophesied, all Nelly's fame and success had not cut her off from him. She had still been his—his to lecture, pet, scold, tease, protect. She had come across London time after time in the warmth of her greatest triumphs to tell him and get his rewarding tease and banter and affection. She was the light and the sunshine of his human life.

He must lose all that, and the boy too. The "sanctuary child," vowed at their own altar, beautiful, affectionate, grave little Simon, born with the London lavender-songs, idol of his busy hours and days. It was an awful break. It could only be faced at all before the Cross, with clenched hands.

And then the fight for Nelly's soul ? What would all that come to, with such a future before her ?—such an agony ? God, God ! there must be some other way out of it.

The next day he went straight to Somerset House, to the Registrar's office, and to the lawyer's. The case remained unaltered. He saw the Bishop also, and had the verdict of a great man, strong and impulsive for moral right, pitiful to poor humanity, merciful and merry.

The story had to be told, the highest spiritual as well as legal advice obtained. To a man so passionately shaken and yet so entirely conscientious it was almost a frenzy to get every possible side of the case clear and defined before acting. He did get it all into his own mind, on the 'bus-tops whose route lay between all these sources of information. He got it so well that he went and saw Nigel again, talked to him more calmly, listened to his broken suggestions, succeeded even in

being more priestly-wise after his own heart. Wished he hadn't said "fool" to Nigel in that hour of confession; yet had to stand looking out of the hotel back window on to grey roofs and struggling to avoid an appalling desire to lacerate him with sarcasms, even then.

Nigel spoke of his wishes. Baby Simon was to be brought up as his father's heir—Simon Lovekyn Finroy, as he now really was. But Nelly stood a hard problem between them still.

"Majorson, I love her!" cried Nigel, beating his brow with his hand.

"Since she learnt to dance in society?" Majorson couldn't resist saying.

"When I first saw her what was she but a girl?—a poor ill-taught girl? But now she is a woman."

"That's true," said Majorson, "and it rather complicates things than otherwise. That you hardly seem to grasp. However, my business is to see her and get the thing broken to her. She mustn't be left in ignorance for a moment."

There was some work he was obliged to do before he was free, but he hurried off West as fast as he could directly it was dispatched. The darkness had descended, and it was later than he thought when he reached Nelly's Bayswater flat. He began to fear that she might already have started for some engagement.

Arrived at the small front door he found that it was so.

"But Miss Lovekyn has only gone to the Countess of Kinderwick's Children's Fête," said the maid-housekeeper. "That's why she has gone so early, sir. It began at seven and is to be over by ten or eleven. She has only one turn, and will be back before nine-thirty, she told me. Won't you come in and wait?"

So he went in, it being then after eight, and waited in Nelly's drawing-room. Curiously enough he had

never been into it before. He had always been kept back by a delicate sense of difficulty about visiting her. It had always been enough that he kept Simon for her, and that she came over and saw them both at the Cordwayners'.

Yet here he was to-night, and the experience brought a sense of wonder, for like most nice women's rooms there was in it an aura of personality almost emotionally vivid. True it was cosy and flowery in the ordinary way, but there was an unconscious, untrained simplicity about it ; a peaceful refraining from paltry and unnecessary ornament which was very characteristic of that candid world-spectator, Nelly.

She had not had time to collect trifles. She was not a trifly woman. The fearful blight of the photograph frame had never crept into her serene consciousness, and of little mugs and jugs she knew nothing. The slightly austere training (artistic) of the Cordwayners had found its reward in a simple instinct for purity of line that came out well, even in a flat drawing-room. The chintzes were large-patterned and dim in colouring, and the carpet particularly fine, an ecclesiastical hand-carpet maker being presumably a judge of delicate Crivelli colourings. Its bareness made its great advantage.

The bowls were full of roses, even at that late season, of course exotics, and, of course, offerings at the shrine. That was easy to see. One tall Nankin vase with some long-stalked roses in it was spoilt by a visiting card being still attached to it, evidently an oversight of the maid's, but rather a betraying note.

Naturally Majorson did not get up from the low chair he had sunk into to do anything so hideously vulgar as to read it, but it dwelt upon his mind again and again as a hint of what was going on here, and likely to go on. It called him more than ever to see the injustice that had been done and was being done to Nelly.



He went over the last twenty-four hours, and the possibility of the next one, so perplexedly and so often that it hardly seemed like half an hour before he heard a hansom stop outside, the lift creaking, and Nelly arriving at the front door and rustling into the little hall chattering to the maid. And yet the clock said a quarter to ten. He stood up at once, his back to the fire, that attitude that gives strength and determination to the meanest Englishman. He needed any helps of that sort that he could get just then.

She entered laughing and radiant, holding out both hands towards him, delighted at the visit, and almost running towards him. He took and held the hands, looking down into her eyes for a second, too overcome to speak a sentence. Her beauty overwhelmed him.

"How dear of you to come!" she cried. "Oh, I am so glad I am home early—such a rare thing, too! But it was that Kinderwick baby party—such a quaint show, and two little tiny boy dukes, and one little baroness in her own right who cried for balloons—and there weren't any, of course. I did birds and animals, to their screams of joy. But why—what—is anything the matter? Simon? Is he ill?"

"Simon is quite well," he said, still holding her hands and looking down into her face. She was dressed exquisitely, seeming to stand like a slim, sheathed flower-stalk out of a cloud of peach colour and silver, with a few blue stones about her neck and hair. He had never seen her in her evening fineries before, and that is always an event in any lovely woman's charm. Even she had never seemed so much the living essence of joy as she stood quivering and dimpling under his touch, full of the brilliant personages and places she had just left, full of impulsive warmth at seeing him in her own home, clinging to him in warm laughter and the scent of lilies. He must get it over somehow.

"Elinor," he said, "will you listen bravely to something I have to tell you—something that is for your good—your dear good—yet which will perhaps be hard to grasp—to see—all at once? Something very urgent."

Her smiles shaded a little to the old intentness.

"'Elinor!' How serious!" she said, looking up at him, still smiling at him. "Yes, darling Master Cordwayner, of course I will. What is it?"

He kept hold of her hands, involuntarily pulling them a little nearer his shoulders to rest there in case she started too greatly, and in a few brief, prepared words told her the whole truth. She listened without a word, never moving her eyes from his, only all the dimples and sunbeams went out of her face, and he felt a twitching and hardening of her hands enclosed in his own. Even when he had finished she remained looking up at him, whiter and harder, but without comment, dazed and wintry.

The desire to drop the hands and slip his arms round her and gather her to him and comfort and kiss her as he would have done Simon was so overwhelming, that in sheer self-defence he pushed the hands away, still holding them tightly so that they stood facing, like two children playing "Oranges and Lemons," hands held in a bridge for the processions to pass under.

"So now I ask your pardon," he said, with the twist in his brow grim over the self-mockery in his eyes, "for all the slights and all the tyrannies that I—and we—have unknowingly offered you for these years. You were never Nelly Lovekyn in our knowledge of you, though we thought you were. All the time you were a great lady. It was Lady Finroy that I found shoeless, but naughty—on that French beach! It was Lady Finroy who came to me for a black dress and a second pair of stockings! It was Lady Finroy who danced into all our hearts, whom Miss Frubbert doomed

to floor-scrubbing, who toiled at altar-carpet, who learnt French in a night-school, who lived in lodgings in Litany Lane. And it is the same county dame who has taken all London by storm, and is a queen of beauty and genius." He bowed gallantly over her hands and kissed them. "Your pardon, Lady Finroy, of Cobdenmere!"

She accepted the homage, saying nothing, but tears were welling to her terrified eyes. He led her to a seat because her pallor and silence began to alarm him, and there she sat what seemed a long time without moving or speaking, her eyes fixed on vacancy. Then she made a sudden swift movement of her hand to her breast, and pulled eagerly and nervously at a thin gold chain round her neck which terminated below the line of her low-cut bodice. In her eagerness it snapped just as she got it to the surface, and from it something small and gold rolled out on to the floor. He stooped to pick it up. It was a wedding ring. He stood looking at it amazed.

"Yes," she said, duly answering his thought. "That is the ring. He thought he threw it away, but I have worn it all this time. You see, it showed me what—what I meant to do. Now you say I have a right to wear it?"

He bowed in silence, and taking the ring he placed it very reverently and carefully on her third finger. It seemed like marrying her himself. She glanced up as it slipped slowly on, and her eyes and his met with the same thought as clearly as though spoken.

"Oh, but I can't do it," she suddenly almost screamed. "No, no, not now. It is too late. The name, the name—that I wanted to have for little Simon's sake. But I can't see Nigel, or speak to him. I won't. Never, Father, never! Promise me that!"

She half fell over the chair-edge and took the sleeve of his coat in eager hands.

"What do you mean?" he said, knowing quite well, but gaining time.

"You know, Father!" she almost cried it out.

"What do I know?"

She drew back. "I hate Nigel. I loathe him. If he is in a room, in a crowd, I shudder, even before I see him. He is horrible to me, sickening. Oh, it doesn't mean that? Not to have to see him, to be with him again? Oh, no, no! You—the Church—all of you, couldn't be so hideously cruel!"

"But my dear child——"

"It's monstrous, horrible!" she said, standing up to the full, tall and flaming and furious. "It is too late, too late! I cannot go to him now! 'My dear child,' you say? I *am* your dear child. I am yours, not his. Long, long ago I was yours. You helped me, you taught me, you—you surrounded me, when all the world was horrid and hounding and cruel. Why, it's you, it's you, with your dear eyes and your dear scoldings and your grave, great love, like God's—oh, Father, I *can't* be ever again what I was. I can't be his wife again. He doesn't exist. No man exists as a man. There's only you in all the world."

"Nelly, Nelly."

He said it with his back turned to her, his head bent over the little mantelpiece. "Nelly, Nelly," it rang in hushed pleading. There was silence a moment, while she realized something of what she had said.

"Well, I'm not ashamed of it," she said in a lower and broken voice. "Could anyone, being human, have received what I have from you, without loving and adoring you? You are the king of all men. Yes, you can put out your hand and shake your head, but it's the darling truth. I worship you, and you know I do. Of course you know. Now I have done. But you must have done, too, persuading me to go and do what it wouldn't be possible to do. *You* have made it im-



possible." The tears that had sprung to her eyes grew turbulent in her voice. She stopped, looking at him, his half-averted face.

His groaned "Oh! little Nelly" was hardly audible. He dare not look back at her for what he might want to say or do. He breathed long and very slowly, looking into the fire, and then said, "We must not think of ourselves. There is Simon."

"Yes, I know. Well, then, let him take Simon. Simon is his. I am yours."

"His first."

"I was never his!" she cried passionately. "I did not exist then. I wasn't grown up. It wasn't fair. I have always been yours! Oh, things cannot be so unjust! Father, I won't, I won't!"

He did not answer. She took his silence for anger.

"Then if they make me," she blazed—"if *you*, who know me, made me do so horrible a thing as that, I will give up all that you have taught me, everything, and take my life in my own hands and lead it my own way. If laws can be so wicked, so outrageous, I will have no laws! I will defy you all—Nigel and you—and God too. I will break myself and my heart in my own way, but I will never—never in all the world—look in Nigel's face again!"

She fell forward with her head in her arms, weeping passionately, and with a few whispered words of pity, muttered somehow, anyhow, he left her in sheer terror of himself, and went out into the night.

## CHAPTER XX

" Elizabeth  
Rose-pure, rose-pale, rose-sweet Elizabeth  
Shall do my will."

From *A Queen Saint*.

ACCORDING to holy Mr. Herbert of Bemerton, the two chief temptations to which a Christian pastor would be likely to fall are unbridled loves and imaginations, and "ghostly pride and conceit."

Should he escape both these, he is then warned that he is of a lower order, and will surely fall into laziness and avarice.

Which is all no doubt true enough, Mr. Herbert being an unquestioned authority on personal sanctity. But "ghostly pride and conceit" seems to have lived on as a flourishing spiritual microbe to an age when the grossness of the other faults, culled by Mr. Herbert from the robust naughtiness of political Stuart clerics, would be rather obviously their own undoing.

And undoubtedly one of the quickest forcing grounds for this ghostly conceit must be the handling of somebody else's emotional matters, especially matrimonial, one of the persons being beautiful and famous, and having given her own heart confessedly to yourself.

Maurice Majorson, just because he was successful in winning the souls of others, would have his own possibilities of sins placed in the hot humanities. It is only your clerical machine who is without temptation, also without success with the tempted.

But now, having to fight within himself an overwhelming passion which clamoured at him all day long, at prayer and at altar, in pettifogging routine, and in work and business, he grew harder and more rigid in his

confidence, in his own unbridled spiritual authority, and more determined to use it to the edifying of them all.

Here was Mr. Herbert's "ghostly conceit" asserting its claims as a good, warm-blooded temptation. It is an old truth. If any strong man has for many years bridled in himself all passion and all the things of passion, he will probably break out in an overweening desire for the intellectual or business mastery of others, and if he is a priest, the spiritual.

To Majorson at that time the absolute renunciation of the thing he had chained to his heart, whose mind-growth and beauty and grace had been warmed into flower by the over-sheltering, enclosing care of his own infinite pity, was a matter for the hours at cold morning altars, with pale light glimmering in the early chill of stone chantries. No one heard of it, and very few suspected it.

Here he fought it. Here he enlisted on his side the swords of archangelic warriors. Here he went over and over again the weary anguish of the whole story. Here he dared himself to think of Nelly as his child and darling and pupil and love. In his writhings and strugglings he even called vulgarity to his aid—henceforth she must be thought of as Lady Finroy, another man's wife. As, of course, she was—Elinor, Lady Finroy. It sounded like a rather snobbish portrait on the walls of Burlington House. One had here to conceive of East End Nelly much smoothed and fringed, in horribly shiny satin, and an even shinier nose, standing sheer up against a cardboard terrace with a tin hound at her side. It was ludicrous, but it might one day, quite shortly, become the truth, he said. He would make it so, whatever it cost him.

And curious as it may sound to the lay mind, so largely did the spiritual at all times loom in his horizon that it was an actual consolation to him, in all the stress and storm of his own suffering, to remember that Nelly

was still his to order and to rule, even though it might be to rule her to love another man.

"I'm in your hands, you know," Nigel himself acknowledged humbly, a few days later. He had come round to the Cordwayners one morning as was his habit. "She refuses to communicate with me direct."

"Hasn't she answered the letter then?"

"No. Not a word. Though you advised it, and I mentioned your name in it, to sanction it."

"You must allow her to get over the surprise of all this," Majorson said judiciously. "You can't throw women about like tennis-balls and expect them to like it too. I let you write to her, as I thought it might appeal to her a little, but I fully expected her to remain silent at this stage, and for a longer stage still."

"But I—what am I to do? Here I am, ready to make every reparation, take them both back to Cobdenmere, acknowledge my fault! I've already ruined myself for ever with the county. I've smashed up my political career. I've given up all I hoped to do in the world. What more could any man do?"

"Go abroad," said Majorson laconically.

"Go abroad?"

"Yes, be scarce—for once. Finroy, you are not a diplomatist. You are too *exigeant*. Your sins and your virtues may all be very lurid, but they have one failing quality—they are boring. In another century, perhaps, they would have got you a halo, given certain conditions. In this, however, they only get you unanswered letters and prompt 'Not at homes!'"

"You are right, Majorson. I feel the world very hard on me," said Finroy seriously, his broad nostrils quivering. "Other men have been far worse than I have without my goodness of heart. I, at least, do feel for poor Nelly and the child, and see their point of view. I have made myself a spectacle before the county for them. I shall never be able to face the Radical Association again."



"I wouldn't try," said Majorson drily. "And my plan solves that difficulty, too—for a time, anyhow."

"But go abroad? At this stage? Surely you must be joking?"

"I am desperately in earnest. Man alive! You must give a woman who has spent over three years as a social penitent time to digest the fact that she is a married woman with a title and county estates—to put it at its lowest," said Majorson fiercely. "You must also give a girl you have deserted time to grasp the fact that you love her heroically. Women's emotional convictions are delicate machinery. You can't run them by steam pressure. So I say go abroad, and stay there till the Radical Association and Nelly have had time to think it over. I will tell her, if you like, that it is for her sake that you do it. That's true, anyhow."

"I think I'll write and say that myself," said Nigel, struck by the infinite possibilities of pathos in this announcement.

"Well, if you like to be inartistic do," said Majorson indifferently. "Only I warn you—she is an artist."

"Then she will appreciate my self-sacrifice all the more," said Nigel, his eyes and nostrils dilating at the noble thought, and got up and went off to write the letter and plan the Continental trip to which, as a matter of fact, he was not altogether averse.

The excitement and scenes of the last few months had left their mark on him, and a London winter which had begun already—in November—with a cheery programme of pea-soup fogs, combined with "La Nellguin's" refusal to acknowledge his heroism, held out but poor prospects to him. It was true that his health was a serious trouble, but he was never a man to have any patience. If things went wrong he could transport himself to another and a sunnier country till they, what he called, "came right."

His mental and spiritual shiftiness was as the magic

carpet-of Arabian lore to him. So after writing a long and tragic letter to Nelly, with touching sentences quite transparently crossed out for effect—his own literary equivalent for a gulp—and posting it heroically at Dover instead of London, for the sake of the extra touch the postmark gave, he crossed the Channel in the character of a broken-hearted man for whom the cruel world holds nothing.

But Terry Alders had his own particular reason for rage against this new turn of affairs. What about her talent, ~~her powers~~, her profession? What was going to be done with regard to those?

"Oh, give me a special dispensation to shoot the brute, Father Abbot!" he said, after a short scene one evening when they were alone, his drowsy eyes rolling to the Cordwayner's smoky rafters.

"But he'd like that," said the priest; "it would be accounted martyrdom. He would have it photographed."

"But tell me—the beast *can't* claim a glorious genius like Nelly to dispense tea to the county in a stucco house in the Rochester brickfields? Never! It is monstrous. Inhuman. There should be a bill brought before Parliament against it."

"It will be my duty to insist upon it," said Majorson, his own eyes hidden in some business with his pipe.

"Your duty!"

"As a spiritual director."

"And I, as a dancing-master, shall protest!"

"Alas! The affair is no longer on that—footing! It is in my hands now, for better or for worse. Isn't it clear what I shall have to do?"

Alders groaned. "What does a wit want with a sex or a soul?" he asked indignantly. "Heaven knows we have few enough of them. They at least might be allowed to be a law unto themselves!"

"They often are," said Majorson. "But how does

that concern me ? It is my business to direct things as they ought to be, not as they are."

Terry got up and moved away, for once really angry with his "chief."

"Organize the wills and emotions of sentient, independent human beings !" he muttered. "Organize, organize ! Reduce to a system. Go on till you kill her amongst you !"

Majorson tossed his head, for a shake, but said nothing, and went away on some hard, depressing duty of his parish to crush the lonely longing that sometimes shook him when he dared to think of the killing of Nelly.

He did not deserve to have his own reproach to Miss Frubbert flung at his own head, and yet there was no doubt that in stifling his heart's longing he was taking a savage zest in his own supreme mastery of the situation. Nelly was his in heart. Nigel was his in fear. They should be ruled into obedience.

Even though he gave her to Nigel, he would dominate her spirit. That was his.

As for Nelly herself, she withdrew obstinately into a hard remoteness, and refused to even discuss capitulation. She had answered two of Majorson's most searching, most appealing, most commanding letters by short notes holding to her original and passionate decision ; but they heard of her in public, going on with her profession as determinedly and as powerfully as ever. She danced herself into greater and greater fame, a feverish sense of triumph behind all her exuberant gaieties. She grew wittier, sharper, more brilliant in her skits, brighter and more vivacious of manner, more fiercely clever in her onslaughts into the follies of her society generation. She crushed out thought by working, racing at work, night and day by extravagances, by frivolities, by the utter "letting go" of the wilder side of her daring nature.

People crowded to hear and see her. Her dresses

were copied, her sayings quoted. Pictures of her perfectly gowned, as models of grace appeared in the shop windows. Women fought each other to secure her for their parties, and paid her extravagant sums to outdo their social rivals in getting hold of her first. Men made desperate love to her, and crammed her flat with flowers and books and calls and offers of all sorts. She met her own photographed face in almost every magazine she picked up—the once ambition of little Bethnal Green Nelly—and saw her name in every paper, or rather the name she was known by. Had the crowds who worshipped her very feet known that she was my Lady Finroy too, with a history, her triumph would have been wild indeed. As it was she knew it, and the knowledge being both inspiring and maddening, gave that angry vivacity to her genius, and the last touch of confidence to her radiant ways.

There had been a fight over her by two important society women who had "big shows" on hand. Hilda, Lady Raceby, who was smart but poor and extravagant, and a certain Mrs. Lawson MacShuter, the wife of Mr. Lawson MacShuter, persons of immense wealth, unknown to the world before last season; said to be Scottish millionaires, with a gorgeous castle in the Highlands rented from an impecunious Duke, and another palace in Park Lane. Greatly run after.

Hilda, Lady Raceby, rushed in upon Nelly early one morning, as she herself called it, but it was two o'clock in the afternoon. Still, as she was only just up herself probably the description was true enough.

As usual Hilda was very much made up and very desperately coming to pieces as regards the trifles of her dress. She was always in such a racing hurry that nothing on her really looked quite the proper thing, but she made up for shortcomings by scent and gardenias and, it must be admitted, good nature.

"Oh, my angel child!" she cried, embracing Nelly



in the little drawing-room the minute she entered. "You cannot desert me! You, who know what hangs upon my securing you! Do you remember that this charity affair—hateful bore that it is so!—is a counterblast to that dreadful blackmailing case I had? My whole reputation is pinned to it, darling, pinned! And unless I can get you I can't get the Duchess, and do think what ruin that will mean for me!"

"But I am quite willing myself," Nelly said, disentangling herself from the sticky, scented embrace. "You know that, dear. It's my agent who arranges all these things, really it is."

"Oh, I know, the wretched creature. It's too awful! I've been to him and it was almost settled—it *was* settled—but that awful MacShuter female has somehow cut in at the last moment and got him by the ear. Oh dear, darling Nellguin, you must come to me, you *must*. Think! It means a whitewashing. Can you refuse? Here, let me write you a cheque?"

"No, no, I can't take one."

"A blank cheque! Take it, take it! I will even go to that to secure you."

"It's tremendously good of you, but do please see that I have no power to arrange these things myself. And I can't take any cheques at all."

"Very well; but say you want to come, and let me fly to the dreadful ghoul of an agent with that. Here, write it—just a line. Will you write it to him?"

"Well, I will, if you like. He may take notice and arrange it."

"Angel!" screamed Lady Raceby, and with many flutterings and jerks and ejaculations she was somehow got back into the flat lift and safely back into her motor and whirled away.

She had barely gone, and Nelly was just turning to her desk to write off that little note to the obdurate agent, when there came a far more terrible creaking of

the lift, a thundered knocker, the roar of a huge voice in the little hall, and in burst a vision against which the floppy and weakly appealing Hilda was as nothing.

"Mrs. MacShuter!" it boomed in announcement, as it approached full sail, all its colours flying.

It looked like a mass of moving scenery, and presented the extraordinary effect of being wider than it was long. Out of its huge chaos of furs and colours and trimmings one got the impression of an enormous, pear-shaped face, deeply swarthy under the rouge and enamel, eyes like black billiard-balls, and a nose curved and full, and also pear-shaped, pushed into the middle of two full cheeks.

Enormously valuable jewels hung on to its every possible promontory—and the figure presented many—and its clothes fairly whistled with silk; its stride was from the hip, but the figure being so short the step was like that of a jointless doll, or Grenadiers on the march. Round its swarthy brow fell gold grapes, cock's feathers, jewelled lace, and animals' heads and paws in wild profusion. It was a vision to stun.

Nelly stood up and turned, slim and a little haughty, from her desk. She was getting tired of these interruptions, and her little chin was up. Then her eyes met the full blaze of Mrs. MacShuter, and she gasped. So this was the Highland Money Queen?

"About my party on the 10th," boomed the MacShuter lady. "I inthist that you be prethent, and do a turn. I underthand there ith a doubt about it. I will have no doubt at all—I will outpay everybody else. I will buy 'em all out!"

"It is in the hands of my agent," began Nelly, her grave eyes staring, staring with a slowly dawning wonder at the Scottish lady, whose accent did not suggest the land of Burns in the least.

"Bah! Money is money!" said Mrs. MacShuter, but she called it "monish." "Here goes—what will you

take to do it? You can work your agent, you know you can."

Nelly began to demur.

"Look here, it's important," condescended the Highland Queen. "It means, or it does not mean, the attendance of the Maharajah. I must have the Maharajah—not that the man's any good by himself, but he gives a *cachet* (she pronounced it 'catch-it') that getsh hold of all the nobsh for me. I'll pay five hundred if you'll come."

Nelly put out her hand and steadied herself on her desk, still gazing at her visitor. Truly she was an object for startled contemplation, yet it was not her oddities that made the breath come quicker between Nelly's open lips, and a darker little gleam shine in her watching eyes. It was the fact that somehow behind the resplendent figure before her there rose up the walls of a filthy room, rows of shelves with cardboard boxes on them, rows of anæmic girls' faces with settled misery on them, the Gothic face of a racing consumptive with beautifully dressed hair and a resentful laugh, and a needle in her mouth. All those shadows and faces behind Mrs. MacShuter, and in front a tossing monkey-girl, dancing in the middle, and the words in a man's voice, "Go and shtarve."

"Five hundred," repeated Mrs. MacShuter.

"Very well," Nelly said, still in her dream. "I'll communicate with my agent."

"The 10th and the Maharajah!" shouted the now triumphant Queen, whirling round and waddling herself off as quickly as she had entered. She had picked up her lorgnette and pushed it up at Nelly as a pig pushes up its snout, during part of the brief interview; but the slim, Paris-robed lady in very pale grey, standing by a Sheraton desk and a tall shrine of roses, apparently recalled no memories to her. She went in a whirl of triumph. She had beaten Lady Raceby.

But Nelly sat down and wrote to the agent, and it is to be feared that in her suppressed excitement she betrayed the unwhitewashed Hilda. For when the night of the roth of December came she drove up to the door of a Park Lane mansion to entertain the Maharajah and following, i.e. the "catch it."

As she entered she gave a few brief but comprehensive glances at the gorgeous house, the palatial staircase, the crowd of menservants, the thronging guests, and by the doorway of the reception-room she got one passing glimpse of the host, Mr. MacShuter. He was standing there talking to two other men, his flabby hands behind his back, a curious ill-fitted concertina effect even in the well-cut evening suit that he wore. The fault was not his tailor's. As there is a class of unfit, so there is one of the unfittable.

He did not see her then, not indeed till the party was at its fullest swing, and she was due to appear with her dancing imitations.

To-night her dress was more exquisite than usual, and her reception, as she appeared with her flushed, radiant face was tremendous. She had never been in such perfect form. She surpassed herself, and the giggling, applauding crowd had encored her again and again, and had reached a crescendo of excitement when she suddenly flung herself into a Highland reel to a cascade of Highland music. It was so brilliant and so abandoned in its grace and fling that the audience, thinking it intended as a pretty complimentary finale to the alleged Scottish descent of their hosts, gave it an extra gay and vociferous reception. Mr. MacShuter himself, by the door, was particularly delighted, and flung in an impulsive "Hech," so deeply was his Gaelic blood stirred by the wild sounds of his native minstrelsy.

But suddenly Nelly dropped the dance, flung herself on to a stool, and fell into a patient stooping attitude,



with arm and hand moving carefully and incessantly as though stitching away for dear life. It was done to slow music. She drew her face to a peak of agony, and coughed not once, but again and again, broke breath, stopped and swayed, held her hand to her side, groaned, and then went on with the stitch, stitch, stitch. The audience watched in amazed astonishment. This lugubrious thing—what was it? Unlike her usual style—no one wanted tragedy here. The thing was so hideously real. From a gay butterfly she seemed to have become a consumptive slave, and to even look the part. The thing had a sort of horror with the music, and the force of contrast. Suddenly, having created that personality, she nipped up, was away at the back of the stage and approaching towards the supposed figure almost before anyone was aware that she had moved. And the approach was the walk, or rather shuffle, shuffle, and slight lurch, with one eye half closed, of Mr. MacShuter. For a second only a few horrified guests saw who the presentation was intended for. They stared in concerned amazement as the imitation became horribly clever. "What you doing?" said the presentation, addressing the imaginary girl. "Coughing during work-hours? My work? My timsh, my monish—out you go—out—out." She pretended to raise and push a resisting figure towards the edge of the stage, with a horrible reality of illusion giving the idea of a struggle, doing the cough, a cry, and then the muttered curses of a man. The last forced push over the platform edge, and the words, "Shtarve—go and shtarve! shtarve!" while the music crashed into a hideous discord and was still.

Back into the middle of the platform came a bowing, cringing, hands-rubbing, leering, inimitable copy of Mr. MacShuter. "Glad to shee you in Park Lanesh, my vriends, ferry glat, ferry glat!" she concluded, bowed and disappeared. A total silence followed, the

silence of amazed horror. Then someone frenziedly saved the situation by shouting, "Oh, oh! South African slave-driver! Very good, very good!" and everybody clapped desperately to hide either their embarrassment or their titters.

For that one brief bit of nonsense had given away the MacShuters as no daring open account of their ancestry and antecedents could possibly have done. To-morrow all London would ring with it.

Afterwards Nelly, dressed in her white-furred cloak and ready to go, sent for her host. He came into the ante-room with livid face and trembling, twitching hands. He said nothing, but leant back against the wall looking at her with a panic of hatred in his fish's eyes, breathless and silent.

"You recollect, Boss?" she said, pulling on her long gloves. She was white now, as white as her furs. "I said I'd dance you that kick back, and I've done it to-night. I want to say that I won't touch your money for this—you can tell your wife I'll square the agent."

He remained abjectly staring at her.

"Lazarus Schutski," she said, "I see you haven't forgotten Nelly Lovekyn. I never meant you to forget her, you know. How is that little ring of sweaters' dens in Piggie's Island? Very flourishing, I should fancy. And how is consumptive Lucy? Does she still cough out her life in work-hours?"

The man uttered a furious oath under his breath, fearing the ears of his footmen.

"She went on the streets—like you!" he hissed.

"Then God help her!" said the dancer, "and put her sins on your head!" and went to her carriage, saddened unspeakably, torn suddenly at the heart, breaking down among her cushions and fineries into a storm of tears.

## CHAPTER XXI

"In the meantime a priest's blessing, though it be none of the Court style, yet doubtless, madam, can do you no hurt."

GEORGE HERBERT'S *Letters*.

It was a spring afternoon. Lady Phillippa and Mrs. Milson went slowly up the stairs of the Mars Club and entered the drawing-room by way of a small ante-room.

The Mars was a heterogeneous Club, very smart and very dubious, exquisitely decorated, and a hot nest of scandal. It had nothing clearly against it except a shrug. No newspaper had ever quite reported its doings, but everybody talked about them breathlessly, with the result that it did not lack for members, and smart guests were always ready to flock to its lunches and dinners to see what could be seen.

"Is he here yet?" Phillippa said to her companion, glancing round the wide, silk-panelled room.

"We are too early," Mrs. Milson replied with relief. Her note of interrogation had come ungummed, and she went to one of the mirror panels to readjust it. At a neighbouring panel another lady stood quite cheerfully rouging her cheeks.

"How stupid!" said Phillippa, and sank into a chair, taking up a magazine to save herself the trouble of having to outstare her staring confrères, who were sitting round in groups, ready for anything to chatter about.

A little grey man with leering eyes, talking to a wild-looking woman on a settee opposite, was gazing her out of countenance, and for once it annoyed her. He and his hostess whispered about her and tittered.

She was looking ill and worn. Her face had fallen in a little, accentuating the hard line of her mouth and the cold rebellion of her eyes.

As usual she was beautifully dressed, but now with a little over-emphasis on the side of conspicuousness, a style which seemed startling contrasted with the extreme pallor of her face. The two on the settee talked about her with an avidity quite undisguised. Presently a Club servant, powdered and gold-laced, came in bearing a card on a salver, and Terry Alders followed the announcement.

"What ages!" said Phillippa, her languor evaporating a little as her eyes dwelt on his face. "We have just returned after six months of the Riviera. I sent for you because you are the one fresh thing left, apparently, in this used-up old desert of London."

"Am I fresh?" said Terry, with dreary disappointment, as he held her hand. "All my life I've been trying hard to be the other thing, or look it. You know that."

"You are the most innocent of beings, or you would not be here!"

"Here?"

"Oh, Milly and I are all right. You are all safe enough, be assured. But this place—this Club. Didn't you know that it was the refuge for social criminals?"

"But isn't it your Club?" he asked.

"Of course," she replied bitterly. "That's why I had to belong. I was refused at two others. Didn't you know? Come and have tea."

She called "Milly," and they went into the large dining-room, now set out with little tea-tables gaily flowered. It was a pretty corner room on the first floor, with wide windows overlooking two smart streets, and exquisitely kept window-boxes. It was crowded at this hour with chattering women, smartly dressed to a point of frenzy, and a large sprinkling of men. The



place was kaleidoscopic with the colouring of riotous hats and furs and frocks.

Phillippa talked on rapidly. "You see for yourself—this is what I have come to!" she said. "There isn't a woman in this room, except Milly," she added maliciously, without glancing at that unfortunate lady, "who has any reputation left for one cause or another! This is a very polite and pretty Hades. Do look at the Harpies! Aren't they unspeakable?" She gave a sudden dry laugh that rattled mirthlessly, and leaned in a half slovenly way on the table as she spoke.

Terry said, "I wish you wouldn't!" half under his breath.

"Do you?" she asked. "Why?"

"It isn't like you," was his lame but earnest answer. Phillippa drove him to be earnest.

"You will pardon me, dear Terry. It is like me now. It's what this sort of life and fate does for a woman of my sort. The law proclaimed me innocent, didn't it? Yet here you find me on my return to London, eating husks with sharpeners and social shadows and adventuresses!"

He leant back in his chair and shuddered with a kind of sleepy pity. Her wrongs had got on to Phillippa's brain, he began to see. She would never be the woman she was, and it made him ill to have to admit it, even to himself, since he had a fastidious horror of the spoliation of anything beautiful. Who was to blame? Nigel, or the social laws, or what? He hated such questions. They opened up things that were not innately graceful and lovely.

"You're not well," he said gently, excusing her still. When women were unhappy it was always physical, he said.

"I never am well now. That is nothing new. Haven't I had awful health all the time we were away, Milly?"

"Too terrible!" said Mrs. Milson, patting her gummed curl with sudden nervousness at being thus brought into the conversation. "Hours and hours lying prone on a couch!"

"I have to take care of myself," said Phillippa, and as she spoke she selected a rather large glass of green Chartreuse from the tray offered her by the manservant, and drank it off feverishly. Her teacup, still untouched, stood at her side.

Terry glanced round the room. On all the tables the same phenomenon was visible. On one quite close to him a small bottle of champagne, empty, stood between two smartly dressed eager women who were both talking furiously. Beyond them another group of women and men mixed were laughing very loudly and smoking in a ring.

A horrid sense of shock overtook him. He wished heartily and honestly that he had not come if it was only to see the wrecking of his dream of Phillippa. It was nauseating.

He began talking about the adventures and doings of several mutual friends since Phillippa had left town, ran off a list of marriages, deaths, and general gossip, and gave her brisk and graphic accounts of his own doings as a "monk," and of how he had retired from the old Temple almost entirely, except to use his chambers as a *pied-à-terre*. He was boyish in his desire to be breezy and to cheer her up. She laughed sneeringly. He would not have believed it of her at one time, but now he recognized the note as becoming a familiar one.

"I should have thought your occupation would have been gone now!" she said, with contempt in her tones.

"Why?"

"Oh, La Nellguin. She has left that little horizon altogether now, I understand. She had before I left,

but now one hears of her as the adored of—I was going to say Princes—I'm not sure about that—but certainly of Dukes and what not! Isn't she going to marry the idiot Barraday?"

"Marry?—Who?"

Phillippa laughed. "That donkey-boy, Lord Barraday. His father may not be a Duke, but he is a Marquis. They say he is always about with her and running after her! His people are seriously concerned, because he means marriage. Why, it's common talk. You are not a very good chaperon if you don't know that!"

"I never was her chaperon. That was old Majorson. But I can't believe it, nevertheless."

"It's true, all the same. Ask anybody you like. They'll all tell you the same. Evidently you are not only out of the Temple now, but out of the world!"

She looked at him, nodding and mocking and searching his face. He tried not to notice that she took another liqueur after this outburst. What in the name of goodness had come to her? And her news, if it was true, reduced him to perplexed silence. He was thinking over its possibilities with regard to Nelly, and the magnitude of the issues, should there be any real truth in it. Phillippa thought he was sulking. She suspected him of a weakness for his pupil.

"And they say she is encouraging him quite cleverly," she went on. "Really, you have taught her very well at your Monastery! She means to be a Marchioness before she has done, from all I hear."

"That she can never be," he said, and then stopped.

Phillippa laughed. "My dear man, she is quite clever enough!" she laughed.

He got up to go. This news, the heated atmosphere, and the change in Phillippa were more than he could stand all together. He must get out into the fresh air and think things over a bit. Phillippa rose and said she

would come too, and would drive him part of the way home. He could hardly refuse.

They got up to come away. As they did so, Terry noticed a tall red-haired woman at a distant table rise as they rose, seemingly watching them intently. She was very richly dressed, and in the distance handsome, and wore her coil of red hair loosed half-way down her back. She had nervous hands covered with rings, that shimmered and glittered even from this distance. She stood close to the wall near the door. As they got near he saw that on this was pinned a dainty programme sheet announcing a musical afternoon, and central in the list was the star name "La Nellguin."

The lady measured their slow, tortuous progress through the crowded room to a nicety, and exactly as Phillippa came within earshot, yet was not capable of getting out of it easily, she said in clear, incisive accents—

"Interesting, isn't it, for the new Lady Finroy to perform before the old!"

Phillippa glanced up, blanching. She read the name—the other woman pointed to it, and it was plain enough—gave a slow stare and would have passed on.

"Lady Nelly Finroy coming here to amuse Lady Phillippa! The house should be crowded!"

Terry pushed forward and got between this strange interloper and Phillippa, who passed on with Mrs. Milson.

"May I enquire what you mean, madam?" he said.

She laughed, her large bold eyes following Phillippa's back triumphantly.

"What everyone knows!" she said.

"I will ask you not to address Lady Phillippa."

"Will you? I am a member of the club as well as she. I shall address her if I like?" Her handsome, hard face looked horribly familiar to him. Where had he seen it before?

Her laugh and her shrug were so defiantly overdone



that Terry, who hated scenes, passed on, fearing a worse one, and overtook the others.

But when Phillippa's indignant party had passed out of hearing, the lady who had thrown the bomb turned herself back and sat down again at the little table from which she had risen to make the attack. She was laughing in hard staccato little jerks, half under her breath, flashing and blinking her fine eyes with pride at her own performance; and preening herself literally, jewels and laces and all, as a bird would have its feathers.

A small woman who had heard all from a point of vantage at the side now rose and joined her quite uninvited, and sat leaning over the table shrewdly, staring and smiling, her little bistred eyes as grimly watchful as those of an alligator. This was a well-known club woman, the successful and celebrated Mrs. Links, Queen Blackmailer and *bonne-vivante*, who had studied Phillippa and Terry at the Brighton hotel.

She remained stoopingly watching her handsome *vis-à-vis* for some minutes with a kind of grudging admiration wrinkling all over her weird little hag-ridden face. Then she said in a low, grating voice that issued from a thin mouth widened into a hateful mock-sweetness that was part of her trade—

“ You just threw that away ! ”

Mrs. Bathshaw paused in the rearranging of a long pearl drop in a nest of emeralds on her breast, and stared with all the insolence of fine eyes and a hard line of mouth.

“ I can afford to be extravagant ! ” she said coldly. “ *I'm* not hard up.”

“ Ah, but can any of us afford to throw away anything ? In this world you must go on getting, getting, getting. Seize and hold on tight is my motto.”

As the little woman spoke she reached out and helped herself to a dish of sweets, cramming them

eagerly between her pointed teeth, an illustration of her theory, and also a commentary on her guinea-tinted complexion. The sweets were big creams containing sticky Maraschino.

Mrs. Bathshaw looked down with almost vocal scorn from her superior height and splendour, as a goddess might look upon a monkey.

"I play for love stakes. Always have," she said, "Love and drama. So far I'm more artistic than you are. You are merely sordid, you know. Your talents would have done just as well for an old-clothes stall!"

She gave one of her short, derisive laughs.

"This world is an old-clothes stall," said the other woman calmly, and going on with her monkey-gobbling. "Old clothes of reputations, exchanged for new; old rags of someone else's social influence hitched on over one's shabby finery. I deal in those, dee—ar."

She drawled out the endearing word till it was almost a hiss, but the low, grating monotone of her voice was never once raised from its dead level. Besant once said that only an innocent-hearted woman can laugh melodiously. Certainly a voice of melodious inflections can only be found in a woman who is somehow good at heart. A dead soul's dirge clangs in a dead tone from behind the still freshly painted mask.

"It doesn't matter to me what you deal in," said Mrs. Bathshaw contemptuously. "Hawk anything you like in your own particular street."

"Still, that bit of knowledge is worth thousands," persisted the chaffering monkey.

"Is it?" said Mrs. Bathshaw. "How do you know? Sometimes you money-grubbers outgrub yourselves and come out at the other side of the earth! Suppose the Finroy man himself is as ready with the declaration of the truth as I am? What then?"

"What, a man with his ambitions? Oho! Not he!"

"You little people," drawled Mrs. Bathshaw, "sometimes get dreadfully behind the times. The feeble part of your system is that you base your ideas on the ethics of the French play, and everyone one meets isn't out of a French play by any means. What you always reckon without is solid old-fashioned British virtue. You assume that virtue is sham that we all play at. I assure you it is not a sham. It's all too horribly real for some of us. I have often knocked my head up against it. I know by the bruises I've had that it's real enough. Suppose Nigel Finroy repented?"

"Repented!" jeered the little woman, and laughed outright, adding: "For the sake of his career! Very well, there would be my chance with his old secrets. One reckons on repentance, naturally."

"You fool!" said the other woman dispassionately. "You justify what I said in the first sentence. You allow no reality to these stupid feelings and ideas. But people have them, even nowadays, as strong as vices. He would—a man like that, all temperament and excitement. He would as soon turn good as turn bad—and there'd be no arguing with him either. It's one of the difficulties one finds in one's career to have to reckon with that sort of thing. They'll turn so, become honourable and sorry in a manly way, live straight ever after, and be as obstinate as pigs over it, too. I've seen them do it, the wretched creatures. Then where will your fine stories about the past come in?"

"Everyone has relations—the family honour——" began the other woman.

"Relations! Who cares for relations to-day? They are an exploded idea altogether. And family honour counts for nothing except making a splash of some sort. Really, Linxey, you are worse than Early

Victorian, you are Georgian. You'll soon come round to be picturesque. People will collect you as a quaint curiosity. Your methods are those of a lady's-maid in the fifties. And you do it all for coppers! For me, I would set an empire against an empire if I could for my own amusement, but I wouldn't steal a woman's spoons or character for three-and-sixpence. I'm not a charwoman!"

There was a crash of glass, and a little scuffling sound, something like an animal's growl, over in an instant, then silence. Mrs. Bathshaw, very still, sat looking with blazing eyes at her own ringed hand, which had a dab of blood on it and a long red scratch. The nails of Mrs. Links were curled up into her little brown, nervous palms, the veins on the tendonous backs of her hands large and outstanding. On the table between the two a champagne glass and two liqueurs lay shattered into about twenty-five small atoms. Otherwise the club friends remained facing one another across the flowers and silver sweet-boxes, only slightly quivering, as the various feathers and flowers about them betrayed, otherwise unmoved, and both still smiling at the lips only.

"Cut my hand, dear," said Mrs. Bathshaw, raising her beautiful eyes to a woman who now rustled up to join them, and lightly covering the scratch with a little square of dainty lace. "Knocked over these silly, flimsy glasses. Ought to have mugs in a place like this—pewter. Ride home with me, dear?"

The friend assented, and Mrs. Bathshaw rose easily, with her inimitable grace, victorious still, and saying "Bye-bye, Linxey" in a sleepy drawl. Mrs. Links flashed back a dead-sweet smile. She could not have got up and walked then. Her knees were unsteady with a giddiness of hatred.

As Mrs. Bathshaw and her friend motored away the friend said pettishly—



"The worst of the 'Mars' is its smartness. If you are to be really smart in these days—I don't mean aristocratic, of course, that's a totally different thing—you must include such riff-raff. Because nowadays only the riff-raff *is* smart. She is, of course, that Lottie Links. Received everywhere, and see how she dresses and 'cuts it' generally! Yet fifteen years ago she was a lady's-maid."

"No?" ejaculated Mrs. Bathshaw, and leaned back in the motor, suddenly convulsed with amusement for a few moments. "Even I never heard that story."

"But I assure you it's true," said the friend seriously. "She served an aunt of Hilda Raceby's, whom I know. The creature's mother was a charwoman, or something, I forget. But that sort of thing or near it. She makes a good income out of the Raceby family alone. She only got into the 'Mars' through a threat, they say."

But Mrs. Bathshaw was shaking and tittering to herself, intensely amused at the whole incident. "Lady's-maid" and "charwoman"! The very words she had used, quite at random! No wonder there was that long scratch on her beautiful hand that no glass could possibly have made. She said she must call at her *masseuse's* to have the little blemish removed. There were other little blemishes also, on the face of creation, that she must eventually have removed.

She had so much money and so much daring and so little character that she could do anything she chose, and a certain section of the world would applaud tumultuously. She had long ago asserted herself as an unmoral free-lance, and had won a right to her photograph appearing in daily papers with an impudent foot-line, which is, after all, supreme glory as it is often counted nowadays. She was a fearless rascal. She neither dreaded God, man, nor devil, punishment or death. There was only one terror in all the world that made her shudder to the very jaws—old age.

That would come one day like a thousand deaths, like the approach of a ghastly doom. After all the harm her beauty had done in the world she would see slow wrinkles gaining ground on her white brow and cheeks, slow dimness filming the danger of her eyes, slow laxity dropping the muscles of her fair face, slow ruin crumbling hair and teeth and dancing blood. She would know that she could charm no more, and have no love or honour to fall back upon. She would know it by her grey face and thinned lips, and haggard eyes and dragging step, and the others, sneers—Good God! Then she would take poison and end the horror. Meanwhile, let us forget it all and live, live, live!

But once in the brougham, Phillippa, who was panting hard, said—

“What was it? What does she mean?” Her accents were thick with anger. She could hardly articulate.

“Nothing, nothing!” said Terry. “But who is she?”

“She? She is Mrs. Bathshaw! Don’t you remember?”

“Yes, yes, of course. Maudie Bathshaw! Good heavens! And they have let her into that club! She says she’s a member.”

“Then it must be since I joined. When I left England I did not see that lady’s name on the list, and mine will now come off it. But what—what was it she meant about—about——” she paused in an agony of enquiry.

He hesitated, glancing at Mrs. Milson’s set, undisturbed face, surmounted by the little black “note,” but kindly and remotely calm.

“Oh, Milly doesn’t matter. Milly’s nobody,” said Phillippa. “Terry, if you know anything, for old friendship’s sake tell me.”

“Well, then Phillippa, it’s true,” he said after a pause,

very low, and went on to briefly relate the story, his eyes anywhere but on the strained and harried face. When he had done there was a long silence. He thought she was angry with him.

After a while she said in low dull tones, "Then I helped on his *wife*? I brought her out into society?"

"The Princess did it, after all," he said. "She's the one who has done the most for her. It's not you."

"I was first," she said. "Can Fate do more to me after this?"

"My dear lady, Nelly is so clever she would have got there anyhow. You have done nothing that I know of, but be kind. For heaven's sake go on with that, and forget all the rest! There's a motto ready-made for all of us!"

But Phillippa did not reply. He left her at her door, going slowly up to her lonely home, her face set in a mask of desperate rage and misery. It cut him to the heart, and he came away, refusing to think of her future.

He had been right, then, when he had said to Nigel on the day of her mad wager, "She is ruined." Ruined she was, desperate and in misery, as is any poor woman short of a heroine in her terrible position. And this for withdrawing from evil, such evil as he had witnessed to-day in the club holding its unashamed face up to broad daylight, decked in finery, daring, fierce, and un pitying.

But Terry said it drove him to be a "monk," as they called him, henceforth. He told himself now that he really was a Cordwayner, in that he meant to try to make some sort of cord to pull poor Phillippa out of her wretchedness and the horror that loomed before her, even if he had to get Majorson to help him with it.

Meanwhile, however, his duty lay in seeing to this affair of Nelly's. He went straight back to Litany Lane and saw and hunted out Majorson. He found

him at last playing with the child Simon, pretending to teach him quaint things from a quaint picture-book in one of the schoolrooms after class hours. They were sitting cheek to cheek, laughing together in an inimitable way they had that made them seem one in years and companionship.

Majorson was not a child-worshipping man as a rule. His special devotion to this special child was born of some tenderer, deeper thing than mere baby-banter. Terry sometimes thought he guessed what emotion lay behind that clinging to the little one.

But he became business-like at once directly he saw Terry, and gave the boy back to the crèche nurse, and came away from the schoolroom and back across the flagged yard with his hands behind him and heard the story, in all its disgraceful detail, even to a description of the attacking Mrs. Bathshaw, only nodding from time to time at Terry's indignant comments and asides.

"So you see it's all known," Terry concluded.

"Yes, evidently, in certain sets. But how?"

"How? *We* haven't talked, you and I, dear old man—I mean Master Cordwayner! But"—Terry spread out both his hands and raised his eyebrows—"will Finroy stop talking in the grave? I doubt it, I doubt it!"

"We possibly have him to thank," said Majorson. "He has met some one over there and confided in him. I can see it all, can't you? Well, this settles my lady. She must decide now or never. Delay is no longer possible."

That night he wrote Nelly a long, loving, but imperious letter. He would have said it was loving, that is since he felt it in every word he wrote. Nelly, biting her angry lips over it, possibly said it was tyranny and horrid scolding.

He also wrote to Lady Phillippa, a letter of very tender courtesy, gravely and carefully worded, ex-



plaining his own action, and thanking her, in God's name, for her unknowing kindness to his poor charge. All kindness, he said he might remind her, was noted by the angels in Heaven.

The idea was an impulse, born of Terry's account of the unhappy woman. But it reached Phillippa late at night in a moment of despair and touched her unspeakably, little as she was conscious of the "kindness" it mentioned. It moved her reaching hand from a glass at her side, and turned her suddenly from brooding to calmer thinking. Her little idols looked on and laughed. Adown the ages they counselled resignation.

Terry used to go and see her after that, and sometimes go about with her, often troubled, very often against his will, but out of a sort of shaken pity. It was a funny friendship, and there were people who talked a little, as there will always be people to talk about the feminine side of a broken marriage, though she be manifestly the suffering half.

But the chatterers who asserted that Terry was in love with her were curiously wrong. He had at one time adored her, as an ideal being, but before she had come low enough to love she had fallen too low.

Pity that turns to adoration is only equalled in unalterableness by adoration that turns to pity. And his had done that.

"Terry always was the giddy Brother," said Dan Larnaker, gently, one day to some remark made by one of the outside men. "But see what an advantage that is in getting hold of the giddy! You ought always to have one real frivol in a missionary band, providing it is a sane and steady frivol behind the scenes."

"Yes," said Brother Jalfin, "just as you are all of you improved by a saintly person with a streak of frivolity or levity behind it all, like myself. These contrasts are effective."

Brother Stephen Wallbank puffed at his pipe while he mixed some colours on his palette before a picture he was steadily painting.

"I swear by old Terry," he said, necessarily indistinctly between the puffs. "He has spent his life giggling to try to hide that heaven made him eternally in earnest. That's the man for me!"

## CHAPTER XXII

"Love is the first comforter, and where love and truth speak the love will be felt where the truth is never perceived."

GEORGE MACDONALD.

BUT the sight of the Lazarus Schutskis, opulent and impudent in Park Lane, fighting for social success and getting it, had caught at some vulnerable spot in Nelly, some latent ancient sense of injustice, dimly connected with the struggles of her old workdays.

She went back to her busy life, after paying off that score against the Highland MacShuters, shaking with hot anger against a society which could allow such a thing to be possible. Over in Piggie's Island were the wretched slave-girls still being murdered—or worse—to allow these creatures to entertain foreign Royalty and English noblemen in Park Lane and Highland castles?

Her flings and hits at certain of such *nouveaux riches* became very fierce and stinging in the midst of her fun. After that huge fiasco a certain terrorism attached itself to her performances, not in the least lessening her "drawing" capacities, since everyone wanted to see his or her enemy taken off, but altering altogether her own attitude to her work.

She now knew that she was feared, and in the secret

rebellion of her heart gloried in it. She had risen from the slave-ranks to be their idol, and now she would tread on them. Genius, mind, cleverness—that was why you had them. To assuage your own wrongs and the wrongs of others. To glorify yourself. To triumph.

She had to persuade herself thus, at all events. Sometimes she succeeded. Sometimes in the glare and adulation and excitement of some big social scene in which she took the chief part she was sure of it. And sometimes when she woke in the night and thought of Maurice Majorson's love for her it was all uncertain again, and she all tossed and puzzled and despairing.

But she would not answer his letters. She was holding out against all attempts to come to a settlement about her own future. She had succeeded in banishing Nigel from England. In her heart she knew this could not go on for ever. For furiously as she might put away the hateful thought of Nigel in his new capacity, the claims of little Simon tugged at her. In all her stunted mother-love she had the vague desire to do justice, that crude, rough justice which had made her caricature Mr. MacShuter in his own house, at his own party. The very inevitableness of her hateful future, as it sometimes appeared to her, made Majorson's determination seem more and more heartless. She knew he loved her, knew what he must suffer by her own sufferings, yet because he steeled her to the hideous duty she raged against him in her heart, and she deliberately fought against him.

She was playing with her powers at this time in a rush of reckless defiance. Phillippa's story was true enough. Of all the suitors who thronged round the new and winsome dancer at that time the most persistent and unanswerable was the youthful Lord Barra-day. His devotion to her was patent. She was

followed and flattered and fêted till her head was turned this way and that and her judgments daily weakened.

Sometimes a sudden memory of Litany Lane and the compelling power of Majorson's eyes and voice came over her in the very midst of her triumphs, and she would hurry away from them, despairing at her own emotion and more determined than ever not to see him. But chiefly she was caught up and whirled in the current of the life she led, and eagerly seized upon its easy maxims, its convenient cynicisms, its illogical codes to satisfy herself and justify her fight with that strong will that forced her to its own and her own unhappiness.

One day she came across the Princess Max at a big charity affair, got up for the building of a new consumptive hospital. It was after her performance, and she was just slipping quietly down the stairs of the big Institute in which it was being held, tired and a little dispirited in spite of the kindly applauding crowd. She was getting too used to crowds, she said. Or else it was the early spring weather after so long a winter, or the monotony of her work—anything but the hourly care and soul-struggle it was.

The Princess Max, having opened the affair, was being perambulated about as usual, her Lion and Unicorn in dreary attendance. She caught a glimpse of Nelly's big hat and half-averted face as she was slipping down the well-staircase.

"La Nellguin!" she cried in her quaint, impulsive fashion. "Call her here, please, Captain Reece. I would speak with her."

Nelly was at once claimed by the Unicorn and taken back captive to the sweet-eyed royal arbitrator standing in her little crowd.

The Princess greeted her almost with tenderness from across the shower of flowers that fell from her dainty



hands. Her sleepy, agate eyes fixed upon the dancer's were, however, a little questioning.

"All, then, is well with you?" she asked, perhaps a little meaningly.

Nelly said it was, touched with a little real gratitude.

"You look nod quite yosself," said the Princess, with extra gentleness. "There is one I will tell of you! He who cares much!"

Nelly's colour came suddenly and gloriously to her face and neck, hitherto pale. She stood a moment abashed, murmured something incoherently polite, and managed to get away, not, however, without seeing the wistful comprehension in the Princess's soft face.

Downstairs, ready to waylay her, stood her arch-suitor, determined and implacable. He was an ugly, vacantly leering boy, who though he was fresh from a two years' course of self-indulgence at Oxford, still bore the stamp of Eton through it all, like a blatant wall-paper insisting on showing through an art tint.

His top-hat, which he wore as he stood on the steps, was set far back on his ears and appeared too large for him, and he stood holding his flowers with drooped knees and rolled-up trouser hems and elastic-side boots, looking the very picture of hopeless but clean idiocy.

And yet in a few years' time, possibly less, he would be an hereditary legislator, and probably not do it so very badly, or, let us say, do it badly gracefully.

Nelly suddenly felt that she hated him and his tiresome pursuit of her. She would have liked to say outright as he drove her home in his motor—

"I am Lady Finroy. I can't marry you. My husband is living. And as for love—another man has made me worship him against my will!"

He would have stared so, she was sure. Would he still giggle, she wondered? Would anything ever take

that open-mouthed inane smirk from off his red countenance?

She got rid of him at her flat door with the usual difficulty, but she knew that now or never something would have to be done. She knew she was already being talked about in his connection—he was too great and obvious a *parti* to escape the chatterings of frenzied mothers in pursuit of him—and unless she took some decisive step she would suffer in reputation. She had learnt her world well enough for that. Either she must do that, finally, or go back to Nigel. There was no alternative. It seemed such a mean war!—a mere matter of the world's opinion, after all. Had she not a right to live her own life in her own way? Is not the individual, the clever individual, of course—Nelly made a note of that—free to live and expand fairly and bravely, without being tied by conventions or religious restrictions? Terry's maxim—"A wit should not have a sex or a soul."

She would be free, if all the world were in chains. She would strike out her own line. Majorson loved her, yet he was not free. He dare not live for love, she said, as men, gallant men, had lived for it. He dare not throw over everything for love as she would do—for him! For his sake she dare defy the whole world, but he—he was afraid of petty parochial opinion, immeasurably afraid. He dare not take the joys the world had to offer, he never would dare. Oh! what a miserable, jogging world! She would beat her life out against it, but she would not conform to its stucco laws.

That night after a huge success at a banquet of one of the big City companies, she allowed the Barraday boy, who had followed her there, to bring her home and even accepted some of the encroachment of his caresses in the brougham with only the tiniest shudder.

As they spun homeward through the City he and his

motor-man had some argument about the direction. It came to a head as they left the Strand, and were brought to a standstill at Charing Cross. Possibly Barraday was for a longer way round, and the tired man for a direct route. At all events their altercation took a few seconds, and during those Nelly, idly looking out, saw something that froze her blood.

Under the full glare of the electric light stood two women, side by side. The elder she recognized at once—it was her old acquaintance, “Kerbstone Laura,” but more abjectly fine, more swollen of countenance, more repulsive than ever. But the younger, striking at memory, yet eluding it, was not at first clear to her—a tall, thin ladder of a girl, with hollow eyes glaring out of her grotesque finery; an enormous hat, a glare of common white furs, half hiding the fact of a skeleton form pinched in a violet frock. Violet! Nelly’s own colour, the one she had worn when she, too, talked so with Laura. The thin girl’s restless eyes about her hectic skeleton cheeks stared to and fro, eagerly, madly, wearily questioning. They, too, were full of puzzle. Suddenly she began to cough sharply, horribly, insistently, and as Nelly gave a cry, looked into the brougham window at the beautiful lady.

Nelly drew back shuddering all over from head to foot. It was Lucy, the Gothic-faced girl at the factory. Schutski had been right, then? She meant MacShuter. God in Heaven! and her own ghost, her own self, what she might have come to, stood there, shivering and sinful before her.

Barraday finished his argument and gave the order to drive on before she could say anything, even if she dare. What could she say? Laura would have had her answer.

But she was breathlessly silent for a few moments. It was the puzzle in Lucy’s eyes that got at her and

shook her now—if she had but known it, the very thing that had gripped the pity of Majorson on her behalf long ago.

What made her think of Lucy now, or care about her, she said? Why should Lucy's fortunes, much less morals, matter to her? They were all free in a free country. Nevertheless the thought of that death-face, painted and glaring, at such a place and at such a time, haunted her hideously. She buffeted away the too familiar attentions of her escort, got rid of him with difficulty at her door, and went and locked herself in her own room to fight it out with herself. What was the way out of the chaos? And why was she growing sentimental? She called it that. You had to be hard in this world. You must be hard. What made her care for anyone's fate but her own? She wrestled and struggled in what should have been her sleep. Yet there was no answer, that day or the next.

But Majorson, after Terry's news, knew that he must allow delay no longer. He must strike the last blow for Nelly's eternal peace. And two days after the incident of Charing Cross he went to try to find her at an hour that he was fairly sure that she would be at home. The spring had come gloriously. The tree buds were filling out into fat cone-shapes on the Hyde Park trees, and the starlings and blackbirds were busy on the moist, ultra-green grass under the trees, nipping the new crocuses and singing in long sweet whistles. The carriages already in the park showed that these things meant the season to most, but there was a smell of Lent in the air to him. Such low, clear skies and vistas of moist tree-boughs, such glorious bursts of yellow light and sudden nipping winds and slanting sheets of icy rain were, to a mind attuned like his, always reminiscent of cold early altars, sparse in deep violet, of fast and passion-song, of suffering and spiritual growth. A deep under-singing of a passion of working



and waiting lay under them both—the things of nature and the rites of the Church.

Come what might, he must steel himself now to do his duty. He reproached himself bitterly as he went along by the park railings. Had he in reality shrunk from it because of his own love on the pretext of giving her time to think it over?

Our delusions are so elusive. He began to think he had, and he blamed himself so intensely that when he reached Nelly's flat he had lashed himself into a state of pitilessness both for himself and her.

She was just coming in from some afternoon affair as he arrived. Indeed, in the motor that whirled away after her alighting he saw the open-mouthed face of her suitor. It was the last spark required to set the fuel on fire.

In her flower-decked room Nelly, cynical, half laughing, gaily dressed, armed with roses, stood and looked back in amazement at the furious onslaught that she was encountering. Her lips, parted at first in the last smile to Barraday, fell and hardened as the bitterness of Majorson's words lashed and cut her.

He told her in plain, unvarnished English what her conduct amounted to. He pointed out the four months' delay, the seriousness of her situation, the infinite dangers of it, and what the world in its brutal sincerity would call it. He appealed to her to remember in such an hour what they had all tried to teach her, to act on it then or never. It was at himself that he raged, if she had but known it, but the cuts whirled and hit them both.

Nelly dropped her flowers and stood with clenched hands.

"I wouldn't have believed," she said, "that you—you could have been so cruel."

"I have not been cruel enough," he said, pacing

her room. "We must both be more cruel—to—ourselves."

"I *can't* give it up and go back to him!" she cried.

"You shall and must," he answered, "if I drag you by main force."

"And to think—I ever thought—I was ever so little—dear to you!"

"It is because you are so wickedly dear that I have to do it. Can't you see that?"

"Then if you have no pity for either of us," she said with suppressed fury, "you will have to remember that I am an artiste! Even you will have to reckon with that. You made me that yourself. Now you can't take it away. Neither can Nigel, or the law—God's or man's, and they are two quite different things. Why have I the power to make people laugh with me and cry with me, and worship with me, and love with me, only to throw it all down at the feet of a man who threw me away years ago? Why, I have a case for desertion if you come to legal things! I could work on that alone. But you urge my duty—duty before God! Ugh, you mistake God, all of you, the best of you. You confuse Him with Mrs. Grundy!"

There was a pause.

"Did you see that boy who drove away as you came in?" Nelly asked. "That was Lord Barraday. Do you know what he would want me to do if he knew this moment about Nigel? If you treat me so cruelly"—her voice broke passionately—"I shall do it. You are horrible. You make me."

"Nelly," he said, crossing the room and taking her hands in a firm, hard grip, "come back to the Cordwayners and think. You are worn out and overdone with all this rush and excitement and suffering. You say things you don't mean, cannot mean. Come to us for a week. To-morrow is Palm Sunday. Come for

Holy Week, to the Sisters, and think. Nelly, let me teach you to think. Come ! ”

She leaned forward a moment with her crying face on his coat-sleeve, and he bent his head over her murmuring things which must have been cooings and blessings, pulled himself away from her sweetness, and went, but not before he had her sobbing promise.

### CHAPTER XXIII

“Thou seemest human and divine,  
The highest, holiest Manhood, Thou :  
Our wills are ours, we know not how :  
Our wills are ours to make them Thine.”

TENNYSON.

BETWEEN the cressets and sword-rests of the old black oak Lord Mayor's pew the moonlight shone on to a lovely lifted face with closed eyes, and shimmered on some softness and richness about a woman's dark dress. Away down in the dim chancel the Brothers sang the office of Tenebræ with the rough, heavy raucous treble of bravely untutored devotees.

“We've got the great Nelly, Lady Finroy, here,” whispered Brother Jalfin behind his hand.

“S'ssh ! ” said Brother Stephen Wallbank. “She's too angelic to be discussed. I want her for a Saint Elizabeth of Hungary—a halo with a hitch.”

“And the Father Cordwayner for Conrad ? ” said Jalfin.

“If you gossip,” whispered Wallbank, “I shall sing the wrong prophecy.”

Jalfin made a grimace which he pretended was caused by clearing his throat, and the winding old Gregorian antiphon having come to a circuitous end—

“Behold the holy city, how is she become a widow,”

with a roulade of almost twenty seconds' duration on the last word, it became again their duty to plunge into the cantori side of the rapidly roared psalms.

Poor little Lady Finroy, fighting out her battle up there in her Lord Mayor's pew, had not become a widow. On the contrary, she had discovered herself, all unawares, to be a wife. This week she was facing the fact with such courage as, in the shuddering of her whole nature, she could command.

Nigel had written. He was coming back after Easter. His note was less grandiloquent in style, but it was still his. His very signature was hateful to her. She turned away, sickened, from the contact of paper he had touched.

And yet she was asked to do this thing! Down there in the dimly lighted chancel, she could see the outline of Majorson's neat head and cassock-clad shoulders appearing over the top of the clergy stall, and further along amongst the bent faces of the Brothers Terry's drowsy-eyed countenance, wrapt in the meanderings of the queer, old-world music. He was beating time with an agitated forefinger, quite out of keeping with his facial expression, and had forgotten all the world in his absorbed desire for a perfect rendering of the curious labyrinthine staves.

These two men had taught her all she knew that was dignified and glorious and good, and yet one of them, the one who had won her heart, asked her to give herself back to her most hated enemy, the man who had injured her the most in all the world.

Was it fair that a man should rear you and change you from one growth of character into something higher and better, only to turn round after years and tell you to become again what you had been before?

Rebelling so, passionately and alone, she did not know how intensely the two men were feeling and suffering for her in their own respective ways.



If Majorson stormed at the foot of Calvary for the birth of her soul, poor Terry stumbled and struggled in a sea of inarticulate trouble for the freedom of her talent. But to-day Nigel's claim, to do him justice, was purged of half its grossness by the sacred tie of fatherhood. Perhaps, across the Channel, that week of watching nights, he in his own poor way struggled over her in some sort of thought and resolve for the future. The brevity of his note was at least in his favour as showing a chastened sense.

The office came to an end. Wallbank had put out the tall cone of candles one by one, symbol of one apostle after another forsaking the Head, the church lights were put out at a signal, and the whole building plunged into utter darkness.

Then came the three loud blows on the altar-stone. To Nelly they seemed like the cries of her own nature defying the laws that would force her to this outrage.

In the silence and darkness the Brothers sang the "Christus Factus," kneeling with bowed heads under the long shafts of white moonlight from the long windows. "Christ the Lord became obedient." She did not hear a word. She was too passion-torn, too raging, to attend to such things of a far solemn peace. It was impossible, impossible! She would return to her old life to-morrow.

Coming out of the dim church when the service was over she encountered Terry Alders, standing in the almost day-white brilliance of the Pascal moonlight. He raised his hat.

"Let me see you back to the Sisterhood—Lady Finroy," he said, with whimsical hesitation. "May I?"

"If you call me anything but Nelly I shall refuse," she answered with a short laugh, but her voice shook with the angry tears in it.

"Nelly, then." He walked by her side across the

courtyard, and round the corner of Litany Lane towards the dark shadows where the Sisterhood lay. He cracked at the flagstones with his heel, as Nigel had done.

"I wonder how long," he said, "any of us will be allowed to call you Nelly,—or, for the matter of that, 'La Nellguin'?"

She saw the question he asked plainly enough. How long would she be before the public as a dancer, if ever again? The hint of finality infuriated her.

"Nothing on this earth is ever settled," she said, as lightly as she could, but her tones would vibrate. "How can I tell you?"

"So long as no man dares to tamper with your genius," he said quietly, "I can endure your becoming a respectable county dame. But genius is free. It is born freely, and must act freely if it is to live. Nothing, no law, has a right to interfere with it."

She looked into his face in the moonlight, her own lighting up quickly. That was the truth that he spoke. For why was one given a talent, a cleverness, in spite of antecedents, in the very teeth of heredity, if it was to be interfered with by a convention, a mere social law? She bade him good-night in stronger, more confident tones. He had helped her more than he knew.

When she got up to her little room in the Sisterhood, the same room that she had had that night long ago—it seemed twenty years ago—when Majorson had brought her back from France, she found some letters awaiting her; one from her silly boy-lord, forwarded on from her flat, since she had refused to give him her address here.

It was a hot effusion, desperately unrestrained in its love language, and still more so in its spelling. He would dare for her, die for her, take her anywhere in the world she wanted to go to, marry her, give her any money she required, make her a Marchioness—what a

lovely, stunning one she would be!—and fly in the face of the paternal ambition, all for her. It was a sound offer, the best and heartiest the poor rascal could make and it brought with it, into this remote world wherein she had chosen to bury herself, a whiff of that wild world of frivol and fun in which she had lived it seemed a whole lifetime. It belonged to a universe which would have laughed to scorn her little inward questionings and terrors. "Of course go back to Nigel," that world would have said. "What, after all, is a husband? Take his name and title, spend his money, and—lead your own life."

But Terry's words had called up another suggestion. "Genius is free." Then accept Nigel's offer, but only on terms making it possible for her to go on with her semi-professional existence. Let him take Simon, and let her go on as before in the world she had captivated. That would do, surely? How out-of-date this place was!

The nun's ugly oleographs now looked really ugly to her. The portrait of the bygone cleric in a biretta, but with gummy love-curls, seemed the type of an ancient and worn-out system of ethics, impossible and unnecessary. The Master Cordwayner was divine in spite of it, not because of it. He was the exception, she said. He was a man who would have graced any impossible religious code, she meditated. That he was the special outcome of his own she did not see, or would not.

She saw little Simon day by day, and played with him as the crèche Sisters played, but less spontaneously. She kept stopping in the middle of the nursery nonsense to study his growing resemblance to his father. The very fact of it seemed to enclose her round with a maddening sense of her own fate. Here was the future Sir Simon Finroy, already showing some of the features and some of the powerful emotionalism of his race. The Sisters used to dress him up in baby imitations of

all kinds of ecclesiastical garments, and he would strut about in them with solemn delight, the theatrical instinct already asserting itself.

He would cry passionately for what he wanted, and then leave off and forget it in a few moments to pose in some other capacity. It was all quite babyish and sweet, but it made Nelly put him down off her knee suddenly, and pull Sister Kate into the workroom to look at the new carpets—anything to get away from Nigel's shadow that crept nearer over her path. It seemed to her in these long, grave, cloistered days as though the Master Cordwayner had her prisoner to force her to think of Nigel. He was cruel and pitiless, she said.

One day she went to him after one of the services, and defiantly suggested her plan about continuing her professional career. She was determined over this, and did not intend to yield an inch. He looked at her rather long.

"It would not do, any more than the present state of things will do," he answered sternly. "Can't you see that Nigel would then have to bring up a child whose mother was not with him? What about Simon's own claims—on you, I mean?"

"Talent is free," said Nelly. "It should never be trammelled by social laws." Her heart was beating as she repeated Terry's words.

"God's laws are above talent," he said, "since it was given by Him."

"But this was only a legal marriage—I thought you did not call those God's laws?" she persisted, flashing back at him.

"Our vows are before God, wherever they are made," he replied. "Yet no soul is free that anything legal can either bind or unbind. The only real freedom is self-sacrifice."

"I hate sacrifice!" she cried impetuously.

"Do you?" he said, and his face, turned to her in the



vestry shadows, looked so infinitely wan and tired, yet so infinitely human and pitying, that she was suddenly ashamed and bitterly sorry.

"Why were we asked to bear such suffering?" she said, thinking of his torn love for her as well as her own ordeal.

"Why are we immortal?" he said quietly. "Wouldn't it have been nice to be little mindless plants or bacilli, living on in a brief day, satisfying every wish and craving, and dying without hope?"

But he was looking in the ashes of the vestry fire with sad, set eyes.

"The sacrifice is before us all this week," he added. "You will rise to it, and become an immortal. I always said you would."

"No, no, no," she said, and went away, to fret and struggle it out all over again in her Sisterhood room. To leave him! To have to give up his dear scolding, fierce authority over her, all the little acts of his petting mastery, his darling tyranny. It was hideous, horrible. The religious air of this place was getting on her nerves. She said she was losing her judgment. It was all too old-fashioned, too impossible.

In one of her moods of rebellion she answered her silly boy-lover's letter, half in bitter joke, permitting the address of her retreat to appear. Cause and effect seemed out of joint. She would have a little throw at Fate. Added confusion to so much confusion would be nothing.

It brought him at once, as she guessed it would, dashing down in a motor, heaving and snorting into the warehoused silences of Litany Lane in a perfect bank of flowers.

The sight was quite a scandal for the nuns, and Sister Kate had a perfectly splendid time at one of the windows. The portress Sister, after peeping interestedly out of her doorhole, and taking in the card presented

by the man, had, rather sorrowfully, to deny admittance, even to a lord with roses.

The man went back with his message, and the visitor plunged out on very staggering knees, and interrogated the portress in an arch fashion, clearly imagining cajolment to be the only salve required to ease the door lock. But the portress held to her orders.

"Lady Finroy cannot see visitors here," she said, in her gentle fashion, almost a sigh in her tones.

"Lady—who?" he asked.

"Lady Finroy."

"But I asked for 'La Nellguin'—Miss 'La Nellguin.' I mean, don't you know, Miss Lovekyn."

"It is the same," said the Sister, her eyes on the doormat.

"The same?"

"Yes, sir."

"But, great Scott, has she been and got married?" he cried aghast, his mouth now open with real concern.

"Oh yes," said the quite undisturbed Sister, to whom the ways of "the world" were always an interesting pantomime of incomprehensibility, therefore this incident quite in the ordinary run of things.

"But when—when?"

"Some little time ago, I fancy," said the Sister, and closed her portal in his astonished face, feeling that she was arriving on too delicate ground for a recluse.

Lord Barraday got back into his motor, using language it is as well she did not hear, and whirled off, trying to remember what it was he had heard about the name of Finroy some few years ago. Also calling Nelly some far from pretty names, which, however, from his expression, were intended as a kind of compliment—his kind.

That evening she received a letter, brought by special messenger, that turned her blood hot, then cold. The marvel is that the Sisterhood walls did not fall at the

mere fact of containing it. The slow, deliberate insult of its proposal was at first beyond her comprehension. When she grasped its meaning she sat quite still with it in her hand and thought deeply into the future.

That night the Brothers missed the pale enshrined face of Lady Finroy from the shadows and iron cressets of the Lord Mayor's pew. Majorson missed her, and wondered about her.

When he walked round with Terry in the moonlight and enquired after her of the portress, he was told she was not well, and had to be content with nursing his anxiety and lonely struggle late and long alone before the Cordwayners' chapel altar. He spent half the night long in prayer for her.

And half the night long she also struggled long by her narrow bed in the Sisterhood, trying to see the course clearly, trying to fight herself up out of the drowning waters of self and human love.

A little straw will turn aside a current. That letter had shown her where she stood, had put her back to the old days, had recalled to her a vision of Kerbstone Laura, strangely and oddly, and the cold hospitality of that hired room in an off-street behind the City, had somehow shown her in one great flash of illumination all that the Master Cordwayner had done for her.

For the first time she saw the full meaning of a love like his, a divine love, that gives all and asks nothing except the hand in hand sharing of its own exquisite sacrifice. Through it and him she saw the eternal verities, far in the distance, high up, away beyond, but there, by the light of the lamp he held.

In a storm of tears she prayed somehow, anyhow, sometimes to the Master Cordwayner by name, as though speaking to him helped her to speak to a higher being of whom he was the priest and minister.

"He for God only,  
She for God in him."

The next day, Good Friday, the Cordwayners saw her again in the Lord Mayor's pew in a hushed paleness and silence. And that night, late after the last office of Tenebræ, with the antiphon "Christ the Lord became obedient" sung by the grey Brothers, still ringing in her ears, she went to Majorson and brokenly offered him the obedience.

"Why do you do it?" he said in a whisper.

"For your sake," Nelly replied very simply. She stood up straight and black-robed and grave before him, like a little Princess, her hands wrung to the backs of one of his chairs.

"No, no, not for me. Why for me?"

"You have a right to ask anything of me, Master Cordwayner—Father—you who brought me to life."

"Life? What life?" he said, looking up quickly.

Nelly stood holding on to a chair-back with both arms out in front of her; the old puzzle in her eyes was breaking into some far look of comprehension, as though she struggled with a vision that eluded her in shadows, yet came and grew in clearness as she watched and watched.

"Love," she said in a broken dreamy voice. "Love that showed me—things."

"What things did love show you?"

She paused.

"To live for something that wasn't—quite—yourself," she went on slowly and haltingly. "To have things that you could die for but couldn't talk about. To see for somebody else instead of for yourself. To work—and sing. Not to fight, but to pray instead. I don't know. It sounds dull, but it isn't. Something—something out of yourself that you try to get up to, even if it's hard, madly hard—oh, heart-breaking, heart-breaking! It sounds quite silly. I can't put it properly. But I have heard them calling, the big things, the **un**-selfish things, the strong, strange things that beckon you



on, and drag you, torn and broken and bleeding, to victory. Those things ! ”

She paused again, looking at him with wide, grave, wondering, yet love-reverent eyes. The little blinking puzzle was gone for ever, lost in that glow of sweet comprehension. She was still Nelly, but already she seemed transformed from a subject to a queen. The soul-birth at last ! Born of their own suffering.

He held her hands, and was silent for a very long time, blessing her, and God for it.

“ You will go back and do your duty ? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ When ? ”

“ When you say so. I am going to climb, but at present I can't see beyond—you. ”

“ You will do more than climb, you will mount on wings ! ” he said, proudly triumphant. Then he remembered his own words. “ Nelly shall fly yet. ” It had come true.

She said, “ Well, help me to find them. ” And he took her to the tall Calvary and stood before it with her, and held her to him, and they kissed in the long, still seal of sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XXIV

“ Still I have loved you. If that love were strong  
Enough to overcome all former nature,  
Shall it not claim the privilege to save you ? ”

BYRON.

THE Parochial Women's Committee Meeting was over after a rather brisk encounter over a matter of dates. Several of the ladies still looked heated. The point had been first raised by Miss Frubbert, who belonged to this committee only on the days when it was postponed ; that is to say, she stipulated that she would

only attend when for some reason or other the ordinary day for the monthly meeting, the first Monday, was altered to any other day.

There was a faint flavour of bewilderment about this plan, apt to become intensified on these occasions when Miss Frubbert, though thus absented of her own accord, interfered ferociously with the minutes and work of the unhappy committee, done during her non-presence.

To-day was such an occasion, and at last, in a chaos of despair, the committee had capitulated to the Terrorist lady by suggesting that henceforth its day of meeting should be altered, in order that the confusion might be done away with. At which Miss Frubbert herself, sternly triumphant, then proposed a resolution, which passed, that in future the committee should meet on the first Wednesday in the month, unless it happened to fall on Good Friday or Christmas Day. It was not until the resolution was formally passed by all the able ladies present that the secretary, a very depressed, spectacled little man, piped up a faint doubt as to the necessity of the stipulation. The 25th of December could never, he pointed out, be the first Wednesday in the month, as the Wednesday could never be Good Friday. He said it meekly enough, but Miss Frubbert was so furious at being corrected by a mere man that quite a scene followed, and it was only with difficulty that she was lured from the fray by the more peace-loving Miss Finny, still wagging and shaking her head and heavily clearing her throat ready for fresh argument.

"Do come, dear," said poor Miss Finny in her fussy little falsetto. "I've got such news for you about that queer Finroy affair. Mysterious!"

Miss Frubbert pricked up her ears at once. Any possibility of a fresh crime of Mr. Majorson's would

be certainly capable of drawing her away even from a fight with a committee secretary; so she joined her little friend with a show of indifference and a parting shot at the secretary, but nevertheless with alacrity for the news.

"Well, it's true," began Miss Finny. "She really is his wife, and the whole thing has been patched up by the Vicar, who behaved most nobly."

"I know she's his wife," snapped Miss Frubbert. "Every child about the place heard that story a fortnight ago. What else?"

"Well, he's come back, Sir Nigel has, very ill and broken-hearted, deeply sorry for his fault. And the Vicar had them both into his study and put his hands on to them and said, 'Bless you, my children,' and now she's really Lady Finroy, and we can call on her. Fancy!"

But Miss Frubbert had no pity or romanticism.

"How do you know he said 'Bless you, my children' at all? You weren't there, I suppose?"

"Oh no, of course, of course. But they say he did, and he must have, because Sir Nigel and Lady Finroy went away in a carriage together. Isn't it romantic? I feel quite excited myself!"

"When did they go away?"

"To-day. That's what I've been simply longing to tell you! To think of her ever being called 'Nelly' by us, and she a woman of title all the time."

Miss Frubbert brooded heavily.

"All I can say is," she said, "I hold to what I advised all along. She should have been put in our Rescue Home under my personal supervision! I would have taught her something useful. Now all the unhappy creature knows in all the world is how to dance. Such folly! What use will that be to her?"

"Well; well, but think!" cried Miss Finny, now

really kittenish in her excitement. "She now belongs to the Smart Set! Now, of course, they'll *want* her to dance! Why there are quite a lot of fast things she will *have* to learn now to keep up her position. She'll have to get to know how to gamble, quite dreadfully I mean, not only for twopenny points with a dummy partner; and everyone will expect her to smoke cigarettes and bet at Ascot and Goodwood, and play forward games and romps at house-parties! Oh, ghost hunting—and pillow-fights with Guardsmen!" Little Miss Finny actually heaved a deep sigh, and her eyes glistened. She fell into a dream of what might have been in her own career had she been born in the purple. Pope's "rake theory" about women is always being proved in the queerest places. Miss Finny was conventionally good because she had been brought up to it, fixed into it, and finally stamped into it by her stern friend Miss Frubbert. But had she really been born in a set that desired to pose as smart, she would just as certainly have gone the whole way in the gamut of folly. No wilder dissipations now shone on her horizon than tea-meetings, sewing meetings, parochial committees, and occasional pilgrimages to Albert Hall meetings, and by some special miracle of fortune a bazaar, and with these she was usually more than content. But to-day an actual romance had crossed her daily path, with a title and a rake in it, and, like all strictly religious women, poor Miss Finny dearly loved a rake, and she could not rid her rambling little mind of the thought of Nelly's fairylike good fortune. It was like a thing in a book, what Miss Finny would have described as a "pretty book." It took one's mind off the relative charms and merits of the unhappy curates, upon whom she usually fastened her eager little attentions, altogether. There was a dreadfully wicked whiff of naughtiness blowing into Miss Finny's



little mental sanctuary as she thought again and again of the white, set face of Sir Nigel as she had seen him go to the vicarage and enter its mysterious portal.

What a life such a man must have led! What dashing, gallant, reckless deeds he must be capable of! How nice and dreadful he must be altogether! Her small hands shook holding her little beaded hand-bag even to think of it, and she stared unseeingly at the traffic as she trotted, round-eyed and absorbed, after the sensible and clear-headed Miss Frubbert. That lady had been talking for some time, but she had not, for once, heard a word of the oracle.

"But really, your folly," Miss Frubbert was concluding, "is out of all bounds. Pillow-fights with Guardsmen, indeed! I'm ashamed of you, Milly. I'm astonished at you. I should never have believed that you would become fast!"

Milly started, chuckled, and shook her head. Fast! What a tremendously intoxicating, whirling, captivating word. Fancy having it applied to oneself! The very idea was overwhelming with subtle flattery. There had never been a single unfortunate curate, however pursued, who had dreamed of calling her fast. In her own wildest dreams of dashing plans to circumvent the clergy on their way to and from small services, brilliant ruses to catch them in the vestry on plausible pretexts, wonderful strategies, carefully thought out, to nail them to the mast at Bands of Hope, Miss Finny had never once imagined herself a heroine worthy to be called fast. But to-day had altered everything. If Miss Frubbert had but known it, from that day the demoralization of Miss Finny began. From that hour boat-shaped hats were discarded, and arch confections, with little frivolous wreaths of buttercups and cowslips, decorated her staid head. A pink straw hat with a frill-shaped edge, trimmed with black ribbon, shortly appeared. It was described as a "Cherry Ripe" by the wearer, with a slightly furtive

giggle. Staid kid gloves were replaced by little lace mittens, and a girlish fashion of honeycombed yokes appeared on the little lady's dresses. She took up water-colour painting, and acquired a playful habit of suddenly propounding riddles in and out of season; she also became perfectly dangerous at raffles connected with church bazaars. The marriage of Nelly had turned her head completely.

How very little Sir Nigel Finroy, who had not even seen her prowling along the shadowy side of Litany Lane that day he went to claim Nelly's submission, dreamed that the sight of his pale, worried face had done this thing for a grave spinster and discreet!

But that wasn't the end. Miss Finny, having for some days very carefully watched and studied the movements of Brother Jalfin, and ascertained at last that he had really gone away for a short Easter holiday and that Stephen Wallbank, the spectacled artist, was now on duty at the shop, laid a little plan. Brother Wallbank's great chum was the senior curate, Mr. Larnaker, and Miss Finny felt sure that an interesting combination would shortly become possible. One afternoon, from a hiding-place in the doorway of an ink warehouse across the way, she marked her man enter the Cordwayners' shop. No one could mistake that kangaroo walk and diving head. Miss Finny's heart beat high. With serious fingers she extracted from her little beaded bag a bunch of violets, rather stale, and went tripping across the street and opened the shop door and entered, archly beaming.

"Have you any wedding services, Brother?" she said. "Illuminated ones, I mean, for presents."

"I don't think so, Miss Finny," said the Brother in charge. "But I'm not acquainted with all the stock yet. Still, I'm sure, now I come to think of it, that all the illuminations we yet have are altar books. There are two of those."

"Oh, dear, it was a wedding, a friend's wedding, that I wanted one for!" said the little lady in mock despair. "But then you wouldn't have much of a demand for that sort of thing at *this* church, would you, Brother?"

She spoke to Wallbank, but her eyes shot a gay challenge round at Larnaker, who was standing a little away examining a new picture by his friend, and did not see.

"Well, no, Miss Finny, we don't go in for it much, that's true."

Wallbank was busy and wished she would go. He was an artist, and to him such women were hardly so much annoying as that they did not exist. He did not include them in his creed of beauty, and their occasional forcing themselves on to his notice merely fidgeted him as a hint of some necessary outer evil that he had forgotten.

"Is that your picture, Brother Wallbank?" she persisted, crossing to look at the large panel that Larnaker was studying. "How nice! So feeling! Lovely!—When"—she turned an archly shaking head at Wallbank—"when are you going to paint *me*, Brother?"

"Paint you, Miss Finny?" Wallbank blushed behind his spectacles in momentary puzzle.

"Yes; why shouldn't he, Mr. Larnaker? I don't know why, considering that that St. Helena of his has got the face of Nelly Lovekyn—oh, dear, I shall have to say Lady Finroy now, I suppose!"

Wallbank was looking blankly at his picture. "Yes, it is Lady Finroy's face, certainly," he said. "But she didn't ask me—she didn't know I was doing it. I really don't think I could——"

He seemed so confused by the request that Larnaker came to the rescue.

"St. Helena happened to be a subject suitable for

taking Lady Finroy as a model," he put in hurriedly. "She was a queen, and she found the true cross. Artists use faces as they strike them, according to suitability, you see. Lady Finroy's expression is exactly the searching, pioneer sort of look you would want for a discoverer like St. Helena, a queenly discoverer."

Miss Finny was nodding delightedly at having got him to speak at all.

"And what should *I* do for?" she said.

"I don't know, really," said Larnaker, getting snappy. "For some reason we always represent the saints as young and tall and——"

"And I am a pocket Venus!" cried Miss Finny, suddenly and without warning flinging her bunch of violets at him, and running to the door and out of the shop in a crescendo giggle.

To Dan Larnaker, who thought the world would be saved if he was uncomfortable enough, the future of the universe at that moment must have presented very hopeful prospects indeed.

He stood gazing at the violets on the floor, blushing solemnly and with indignation, while Wallbank went suddenly into a fit of laughter which forced him to sit down on a bench to have it out.

"She's meant to be imitating Lady Finroy!" he said between his chuckles. "Don't be hurt, old man. It's the force of example. After all these years of helping old Mother Frubbert to lead our poor Nelly a dog's life, now she has discovered her to be what she would call a lady of title, she is suddenly going in for the same style herself!"

"The same style?" snorted Larnaker.

"Well, what she conceives to be the same, anyhow. Oh dear, poor Nelly! poor Nelly! What a caricature! The good lady will be doing us a dance next!"

"Libera nos Domine!" said the indignant Larnaker,



and picked up the violets and flung them out of the door, and stalked away in a temper, vowing to tell Jalfin all about it. After that, whenever he saw a woman coming he put up his umbrella. It became a chronic habit.

Poor Miss Finny! How little her trifling undeveloped experience could show her if she could make no sort of guess at Nelly's martyrdom, and yet a thousand other women, of wider knowledge than hers, would have envied the little dancer's good fortune.

They had to meet, she and Nigel, and in Majorson's presence take upon themselves again the burden of a new life. After one critical, comprehensive look, cold and unresponsive, Nelly had made her formal promises with her eyes carefully averted from her husband's. It was all she could do at that stage. She might force herself to her duty, but she could not look at him. That was beyond her.

A little grace had come over Nigel, partly perhaps owing to his anxiety as regards his own health, and partly a faint stirring of remorse, roused by his sense of his own fatherhood. There was no doubt of his pride in the child. He had come back, quieter in manner and mood, and had asked at once for his little son, and had sat and held him and played with him, seriously and watchfully, in Majorson's study, without remembering to pose. He seemed never to tire of watching the handsome, grave boy, and talked of his future, and made plans for it, in jerky, disconnected sentences, half uttered as though he were thinking out some problem.

But for the Master Cordwayner the crash and glory of the Easter music, the golden festival of lilies and springing life and immortal victory, rose into a passion of triumph over all his own—and her—suffering. The thing he had worked for had risen from its earthy tomb,

like the crocuses and Lent lilies springing out of the moist mossiness all over the fields and woodlands this brave and sacred tide. The soul of her he had made his little child was born. They had not been able to trample it in the gutter-mud after all. Out of long darkness it had arisen, strong and brave and splendid, white with consecration. And so he sent her forth. As he mused to and fro in the grey courtyard, on the early mornings of that festal octave, about the grave and stately duties of his office, in his heart there sang and lilted George Herbert's quaint Pascal lyric—

“ I got me flowers to strew thy way,  
 I got me boughs of many a tree ;  
 But thou wert up by break of day  
 And brought thy sweets along with thee.

The sun arising in the East  
 Though he give light and the East perfume,  
 If they should offer to contest  
 With thy arising, they presume.

There is no other day than this ;  
 Though many suns to rise endeavour,  
 We count three hundred, but we miss  
 There is but one, and this one ever.”

Through all the long grey years to come he and Nelly would be hand in hand in spirit, linked at least in this arising.

## CHAPTER XXV

“ We must live like bourgeois, and think like artists.”

FLAUBERT.

“ IF I sit very still on this long chair, with my feet on two stools, and you wrap that rug round my knees crossways over the other, Alec, and Cara ties this shawl over my head, and one of you holds an umbrella

over me in the direction of the wind, I don't *think* I shall need to go below," said Mrs. Cates, producing many bottles of smelling-salts, a flask, and hand-bag from the pockets of her many coats.

"Go below, Aunt! This isn't the sea—it's only a river!"

"Well, but, Cara, it's a boat, isn't it?"

"Oh, it's a boat—or—what the French call a boat," Cara replied contemptuously.

"Then it will certainly upset me unless I am careful. I always do have to go below in any steamboat, French or English."

"There's nothing but machinery and rancid oil in the lower part of this one, Aunt. You can't go and get mixed up with that, so you must stay where you are till we reach Croisset. It's not an hour's trip."

"And what are we going for after all? I'm sure I don't know why I let myself be dragged in this way to see Flaubert's summer-house, when I feel sure I shouldn't have approved of the man in real life!"

"No, he wouldn't have come to your parties," murmured Mr. Alec Cates to himself, his eyes on the long panorama of quays and wharves, with their bristling masts and queerly shaped craft, and their background of wooded green slopes.

"But it's a relief to get away from the noise and smell of Rouen, certainly," said Mrs. Cates, paying not the slightest attention to her spouse. "And, after all, these instructive, mind-improving towns do make you relieved to get back to England, don't they? There is that about them. I'm longing to see something really ignorant and English again."

"I think those two people leaning over the rail at the other end of the boat—not those idiotic, chattering tourists—are English," said Cara, staring hard at a man and girl in the distance who watched the scenery together, saying very little, but apparently absorbed

in some mutual thoughtfulness. As she spoke the lady turned herself round and fixed her attention on the opposite bank, and pointed out the effect of a white *chalet* against dark trees and a long wooded islet in the foreground to the man with her.

"Dash it, Maria, there's a pretty woman at last!" exclaimed Mr. Cates out loud. "Thank the seven destinies!"

Mr. Alec Cates so rarely addressed anyone at all, and when he did so was so inopportune that his rare remarks always came with the suddenness and strangeness of a telegram, stating that a person you dislike is dead. For this reason he always commanded a startled and rather uncomfortable attention from his circle. He was a little man, of Scottish birth, with a deeply lined, brick-red face, and a rather aggressively yellow moustache, but white hair. He was in the City, but looked as if he was in the army, and had been told so so often that he had slipped into a way of pretending to the follies of that great service. He prided himself that he could swear like a trooper, and knew a pretty woman when he saw one, and was certainly a bit of a dog. As a matter of fact he was quite harmless, and completely run and ruled by his wife, but the tradition that he was rather smartly vicious was allowed to remain in the family as an asset in some dim way adding to its distinction.

His sharp little Aberdeen terrier's eyes were now so eagerly fixed on the lady at the far end of the deck that both Cara and Mrs. Cates turned to look, or rather Cara turned, and Mrs. Cates strove and struggled helplessly to see over the top of her many wrappings and bindings, hot-water bottles, footstools, and cushions.

"Is she smart?" she asked.

"Yes," Cara admitted unwillingly. "Very smart style, though her clothes are quiet. Very well born. Anyone can see that at half a glance."



"Dashed attractive woman," said Mr. Cates. "Where've I seen her before? I know her quite well."

"Quite a Society woman," said Cara. "You always *can* tell birth. Why is it?"

"Where, what?" said Mrs. Cates, climbing at last out of a hillock of sea-voyage accessories. "Over there, with the flabby-looking man? There? Why, that's 'La Nellguin!' My dear 'La Nellguin!' But how delightful! Going somewhere to perform, of course. Why, I thought she'd disappeared. Two months ago I lost her. But who is the man?"

"Hush, Aunt," said Cara. "She'll be looking over here in a minute. The question is, do you mean to acknowledge her or not? Of course this *is* only the Continent, but still, after all, a mere entertainer, a dancer! It is now or never—what shall we do? Hush! Decide."

"Of course I'm going to talk to her when I can get undone," growled Mrs. Cates, tugging angrily with her wrappings and casings. "Isn't she a friend of the Princess's? And didn't she turn up always, at all times, and in time, when African explorers slid away on fearful pretexts, and Arctic discoverers sent cold telegrams of excuse? There was not a pianist or an opera-singer, or a new peer, or an improper novelist who didn't *sometimes* behave like a jelly in the sun. Just when I thought I'd got them they melted away. Why, even the famous Spiritualists were elusive, though they do like showing off, and you know how horrid and unsatisfactory charitable countesses are, while bishops are bywords! But Nellguin always came, and if only for the sake of getting her in the future I must speak to her now."

"But the man with her, Aunt! He looks so horrid. He is clearly some quite low person. See how surly he is!"

"You can all shut up," said Mr. Cates morosely. "If that's who the gal is. I happen to know that she has got married and that that fellow with her must be her husband. He is a fellow with a title, as it happens."

"No?" said Cara, reverent and breathless.

"Yes, he is. Not much character, though. His name's Finroy—Sir Nigel Finroy. So our *belle amie* is 'my lady.' Now, Cara?"

"Dear Aunt," said Cara, rising. "Shall I go across and speak to her for you, and say you will come across to her? Did you say Lady Finroy, Uncle Alec?"

Nelly, leaning on the rail a little defiantly, silent and absorbed, with her eyes on the swirling waters, felt her arm lightly touched and looked round to see the prominent teeth of Cara revealed in a huge, all-embracing smile.

She stared at the intruding vision unseeingly for a moment. She and Nigel had been touring about in this idle fashion for weeks now, he acquiring new fads for rather undiscovered inland spas at every turn, and motoring to one after another, on a valetudinarian pilgrimage that had both its pathos and its irritation. And she was still fighting and dreaming inwardly, trying to work out an elusive system of salvation, and faintly antagonistic towards the outer world, especially that connected with the proprieties.

A touch of mystery in her eyes, and a reserved secrecy of her manner added a curious charm to her bearing, though she did not know it herself. And if anyone had dared to tell her that her knowledge of her own right to now look the world (of wives) in the face had given her dignity, she would have denied it hotly.

But it was so. Miss Hume-Wrigley was right for once. The slim lady in dark tan travelling suit, of smart cut, veiled and graceful, certainly did look a personage of some sort. She now pulled herself together at the sight of Cara, solely and simply be-

cause Cara was a young woman, and it was ever her way to be good to the girl-things that came along her path.

She smiled at her quite nicely, heard her message, rather carelessly introduced her husband, and then went across to Mrs. Cates's chrysalis form, and greeted her with a little mixture of weariness and relief. Any encounter was better than that everlasting *tête-à-tête* staring at panoramas.

Would she ever be able to talk to Nigel, in the sense that people may be said to converse? She had heard his impassioned explanations a thousand times. She had listened to many confused protestations. But, unless he was at the ultra point of melodrama, Nigel had nothing to say now. He seemed to be falling in a habit of inertia. Almost to have grown incapable of anything but one of the two extremes.

"Congratulations!" said Mrs. Cates enthusiastically.

"A splendid marriage, dear."

"Do you think so?" said my lady sadly, her eyes on the long broken line of Croisset houses in the distance, shrugging suddenly and shaking herself as a reminder to get into social line.

"We were all so charmed!" prattled on Mrs. Cates. "My husband will assure you how much so!" Mr. Cates here grunted ominously. "And is this the—the honeymoon?"

"O no—yes," said Lady Finroy hurriedly. And then—"Yes, it is. Of course."

Her eyes, gazing away wistfully, took on a shade of the old witch's mockery. But Mrs. Cates never saw fine distinctions in anyone's manner and expression.

"And shall you—no, I suppose not—go on dancing?" she asked.

"Goodness knows!" said Nelly bitterly, and then added, after a very long pause that palpitated like the little bumping engines below them, "No. Of course."

They were got off the noisy deck with some difficulty

owing to Mrs. Cates's numerous belongings having to be collected, and piloted through the brown quay-beggars by sheer force. Mrs. Cates always made a point of dressing abominably when abroad. She said it showed that you weren't a mere tourist, and she called her cabman's ulsters and shapeless hats "globe-trotting gear."

"These little intellectual pilgrimages are so charming," she said to Nigel as they left the quay.

"They're the thing to do, I've no doubt," he replied stiffly. "My wife likes them, and so I look in too sometimes. This fellow is a fellow I believe everyone ought to be interested in, though. Very clever, and all that."

"Oh yes, indeed—dear Flaubert!" sighed Mrs. Cates rapturously. "How true that is. He was indeed a genius."

"Do you care for his things?"

"Care? I adore them!"

"Of course I got through all my coaching in the Arts and that sort of thing at Harrow. I haven't had time to go in for those brainy things much since. We men of affairs haven't."

"No, indeed. And the same is true of we Society women, Sir Nigel. But my niece is such an enthusiast that I try to follow her afar."

Cara, stalking through an overgrown and weedy waste of garden, past the closed shutters of a disused factory, was making for a small dwelling-house, enclosed, with a new plantation begun round it. Mr. Cates and Lady Finroy followed.

"Here is the Pavillon de Flaubert!" interrupted the strident tones of the leader, whipping them all up. "Come along, now, and see where he wrote 'Madame Bovary.' Yes," she referred to her copious guide-books. "That's right. He did write it there. It isn't very proper, but that's another affair. No one need read it. What? Poor little spot? O yes, quite poor.



Geniuses always are, especially if they are literary. Poor in quite a common way, always."

"Providence settles these things very fairly," said Lady Finroy. "You either have money or wits, don't you? I never met anyone with both."

"Ree-ahhly?" said Cara, and displayed her capable-looking teeth, striding along, peering into corners of the weedy garden-waste.

"Yes, that's where he and his mother used to pace about arm-in-arm in the evening. Was it his mother? she went on, referring to her open guide-book again.

"I hope it was," said Mr. Cates. "But it *may* have been George Sand."

"Who? Nonsense! Yes, he was very fond of his mother and his niece, Caroline, and——"

"And Louise Colet," said Mr. Cates softly.

"He sounds more 'domestic' than I thought," said Mrs. Cates, clearing her throat with relief. "That is something, anyhow. These Frenchmen are usually so—so.—What, Sir Nigel?"

"Who on earth was the Johnny, when all's said and done?" said Nigel aside to her, groaning in despair.

"*I don't know*," she whispered darkly, adding, "But don't tell the others. If they hear me say so they'll be angry, because they don't either; but it's bad form to admit it." Then out loud, "Ahem! Charming! Yes, very interesting, Cara. I'm glad to hear he ate his meals here in the middle of his writing his books. I have found *that* out," she said aside to Nigel. "When we left Rouen I thought he was a musician—I suppose the word 'pavilion' made me think of conducting bands—besides, he had such a long beard in the picture, and I knew he couldn't be a Nonconformist minister, the French are too professedly shady for that. However, after a little veiled diplomacy, I do find that he wrote things. That's a point gained. isn't it?"

But after an hour's violent literary pioneering by the able and dictatorial Cara they managed to part, the Finroys' motor having come from Rouen by road, by arrangement, to take them further along on their tour. Mrs. Alec made them vow to meet her in Paris. They left Cara bundling her tired family back on the Rouen steamer, congratulating herself that she had "done" Flaubert thoroughly, and improved her relations' minds into the bargain.

"Aren't they exhausting?" said Nelly, as they drove away. "Didn't you find them so?"

"O well, the old girl's rather sensible," said Nigel. "No nonsense about her, and doesn't go in for any historical sort of clap-trap, either. That's common sense, anyhow."

Nelly laughed shortly. Just now everything appeared ridiculous to her, all things were somewhat out of joint, She was struggling along from moment to moment to bear it as best she could, but she was doing it with clenched hands. If Nigel was a little more ridiculous than usual it was only a part of the whole tragedy, that went on from day to day.

When they went on to their next destination, a quaint old-world spa, she found her way to the cathedral that loomed over the turreted little town from a central hill, and went and stayed in the shadows by herself, with shut lips. Something drove her to go there, though she was without utterance when she did so.

She said to herself that in this way she met one man's spirit-longing, the *nuance* of him, and that though, humanly, he could know nothing of it, by some divine whisper of angels perhaps he might. She said this sense of a bond with him alone could keep her from lacerating Nigel's follies with her clever tongue, wounding him, injuring him for the wreck of her own life.

She got into the way of going to early mass, keeping

a sort of mystic tryst with Majorson in her own consciousness. When the pale golden, still mornings dawned over the quaintly tiled hill-town, with its square lichened ramparts, and its ribbon-like silver river, she would emerge unfailingly from the drowsy little hotel and climb the narrow, cobbled way to the grey church of *Notre Dame de Victoire*.

Crouched in corners, she would snatch blindly at odd tags of the masses muttered at rich, dim side-altars by industriously incoherent priests, understanding nothing but the gestures, but passionately comforted by their familiarity. Here she called to his spirit over the distance and the silence, and knew by some inward token of her own that he heard her. He must and should hear her. They two would touch so, though all the world divided, though at present they might not even write. She was his in the world of the spirit, she said, glorying at the thought, though in the material she was a prisoner in bonds. Spirit at least may meet with spirit.

After a while some of the other devotees noticed her, with the curious kindness of the French.

"Who is *L'Anglaise*, then?" said a white-capped, mahogany-faced peasant woman to the little Normandy pippin of a dame who sold the votive candles for the shrine of *Le Sacré Cœur*. "Do you know her?"

"*Non, non*, yet do I," replied the candle-vendor oracularly.

"How then? Speak, what is she?"

"*Qui voulez-vous?* A wife, then—in all but the soul," said the shrine-woman, shrugging.

"*Peut-être* a widow?" said the first.

"*Mais, n'est-ce pas.* Worse, indeed," said the candle-seller, counting out some sticky coins, oily with candle droppings, in her palm as she spoke.

"How do you know?"

"She has so great a devotion to *La Sacrée Vierge*,"

replied the other indifferently. "The wreaths that lie at the feet of La Pucelle are mostly woven by the deeds of bad men."

"You should know—you that watch here always," said the peasant, and went back quite easily and without further distraction to her own devotions, which consisted of a great number of rosaries repeated reverently and devoutly before the Blessed Sacrament, irrespective of the clatter, clatter of tourists' feet and the loud impertinences of their blatant stage whispers.

But as time went on Nelly, going often on these voiceless pilgrimages, grew to associate the smell of stale candle grease and old incense, and the sight of gilded cherubs and pink-and-white St. Philomenas, with a sense, if not of consolation, of baby courage, beginning to grow and be daily renewed, and some faint clearness of inward vision developing. Amongst its sudden happinesses was an occasional sight of a priest's face, perhaps half turned away, dark and smooth, recalling such another face far away in England, and making the heart sing.

Or of afternoons she would go climbing up the steep hill to the ramparts, leaving the narrow-wayed, malodorous little township behind her, and letting the wind whip her face as she looked down over the square, straight fields, and away to the flat, treeless distance.

From here she could see down through the elm-tops into the cobbled squares and courtyards of the town, and watch the black-gowned priests, walking two and two, with their broad hats and black-and-white neckbands and wide square shoes. She could not see their grave, clean-cut faces at that height, but could the more easily imagine for them another face, dear and brown and beautiful, and feel the thrill of strong courage that it gave her.

Nigel, finding her disposed to drop her sarcasms and allow herself to be amused, took her about to the



various entertainments the place afforded, mostly in the evenings. By day his "cure" and his billiards or *écarté* occupied him. But he was kind to her in his uncomprehending way, and showed consideration for her most trifling wishes, always, of course, so far as he understood her wishes. She tried to see things with him, and laughed and applauded and made fun, and studied singers and performers. She would have made fun easily if her heart had been breaking. It was her outer nature that did that, almost mechanically. She inherited it of her Cockney forbears, who laugh as they starve in their East End hovels.

"You always were a jolly little thing, you know, Nell," said Nigel, one of these evenings, looking at her with half-curious, much-admiring eyes, as her laughter's infection caught some of their fellow-audience and sent a ripple over it. "This show's poor enough, and yet you clap it like a baby!"

"It's funny," said Nelly, "even if it doesn't intend to be. You can always get hold of your fun that way."

"I don't see that," said Nigel sententiously. "Farce is farce and seriousness is serious. There are a few comic things in the world—fat old men and mothers-in-law—but most things aren't laughable. I see nothing to laugh at, anyhow!"

"I see lots," said my lady, and wriggled under her fine wraps.

One brilliant day, when the shadows cast by the stone walls on to the white chalky roads were almost ultramarine, and the sun burned hotly on to the yellowish green of the young vineyards, they set off again on their travels after magic waters.

They had alighted from the car at a hill-top, where stood a large wooden, roadside *calvaire*, the better to see this and the view of the far-stretching, downy plain. They trod along in the white dust together, distraught and unspeaking, when they came suddenly across another

creature by the same lonely shrine, watching the same far prospect—a ragged, vagrant girl with a child beside her, seated on the low stone wall, almost under the shadow of the crucifix, her brown head covered by a magenta handkerchief, and the yellows and russets of her peasant dress, either got up to imitate an Italian or else perhaps the real thing. Her hand rested on a roughly made wooden cage in which sat a pair of green love-birds by a wheel, and a shabby placard announced in three languages that these told you your fortune. The soft, pretty peak of the girl's brown features lifted clear against the pulsing blue of the sky recalled something vaguely to Lady Finroy, and she lingered to look at the forlorn and dusky little picture, arrested.

"What are you looking at?" said Nigel.

"Those. See, the bird tells you your fortune!"

"It hasn't told them theirs, evidently," said he, the dismissal of contempt in his tone, walking on as he spoke.

At the sound of their voices the girl looked round, and her eyes lighted full on Lady Finroy, and then remained so, the momentary mistrust of the vagrant giving way slowly and pathetically to a look of surprise, then of almost passionate admiration. Nell was looking back as steadily. It was her old self that she saw.

Suddenly something caught at her throat and dimmed her eyes. That this small creature should look at her and worship! That she, who had everything done for her, should be adored, and this wayside thing be despised by Nigel! It was terrible.

"I'm going to have my fortune told," she said, suddenly imperious.

"Oh, nonsense! Like servant-girls!" he protested. "Horrid idea. Bad form. Come——"

"You can go on to the motor, if you wish," she replied defiantly, and taking out her purse she approached the little Sibyl.

"Rot!" and "Childish nonsense" and "*Infra dig.*"

murmured on the wind, but Nelly took no manner of notice, and let him stray on beating at the campion flowers by the dusty roadside with his stick, while she went through the little formulas of having the wheel turned by the green love-birds, and her "fortune" indicated by the chance of their stopping at certain words or sentences. The carved *calvaire* seemed to bend its thorn-crowned head in listening. The attitude of pity seemed concentrated on the two girl-women.

The road-Sibyl, breathlessly awed at so beautiful and friendly a customer, hardly stammered out the readings, her eyes aglow, her hands uncertain.

"Great, and rich, and lovely, and fortunate—and loved," she read out pantingly. "Madame is such already, though! He tells us no news, this bird. He is a poor fowl at best. And blest by heaven, and will bear a great title in the future—but madame has that now? Surely a Comtesse or Madame la Princesse! *Certainement!*"

"I have a title," said Nelly slowly. "Whether it's great, though——"

"This will be something the greatest of all," said the tawny girl, with reverence. "I know not. Perhaps queen. But the highest. Madame will bear one of the finest names in the world."

Nigel's words! Were the grey dames and the wheel, then, still busy?

"It isn't likely," laughed my lady.

"All things are likely," said the girl, closing up the poor, shabby cage a little sadly. "To some the gods give wings, even as these foolish birds. Thou, madame, and even I may one day spread ours to the sun, though mine are in poor feather!"

Without a word Nelly leant forward and kissed the brown cheek, and put some money into the girl's thin hand. So lavish was the reward that the creature fell to kissing the hands of "Madame," and addressing her

as "Madonna," so that Nelly went flying down the hill after her rather disgusted husband to get away from the sobbing raptures she had evolved.

"She says I'm to be a queen!" she laughed, as she caught him up.

"You are a queen," he replied half sulkily, "of my heart."

"Thank you, thank you. Quite pretty," she said, and sang a bit to herself as she went along in the dust; snatches from *La Bohème* and *Rigoletto*. Somehow she wanted wildly to throw in her lot with the brown girl and the birds of fortune, and go adventuring in and out of the little cobble-streeted shady French towns, dancing at the cafés, haunting market and *auberge*, taking her luck and laughing in the sunlight from day to day. Yet even more she dimly, vaguely wanted to help the same girl out of the life, lift her into another. What a ridiculous idea! It sounded like one of the Master Cordwayner's! Whatever made her think of such a stupid thing as that? Of course the fortune girl was happy enough. Much happier than if you taught her to think. But suppose life taught her to think? Well, whose business was it? Is anyone his brother's keeper? Then she suddenly remembered another wandering girl sitting on a limestone wall on the coast of that very country, and cried out in her heart to him who had made himself keeper of herself for ever.

Later on their wanderings took them to the capital, and as they had promised they came again across the Cates family, all rather cross, having clearly overeaten themselves into a state of gout, cynicism and unbelief generally.

"Paris is hideously overrated I will say," Mrs. Cates remarked, "and the hats that they make such a fuss about most unbecoming. I'm sure I can never get one to suit me. Only the dinners are any good, and you get past eating any more of those after a time."



This lucid parable of cause and effect did not seem so clear to herself as it was to the onlookers. She looked so very puffy and yellow that it was quite clear to all but herself why the hats did not suit her, but she never saw it herself.

The Finroys went to the same hotel, and had the pleasure of hearing her grumbles, and seeing her drink iced water for breakfast, being advised to do so by an American friend with an even yellower complexion than her own. The literary tours were still being kept up, but mainly by Miss Hume-Wrigley, who was very busy at that time "doing" Paris, which she had never visited before, to the escort of the Bishop's party guest—that social and ethical man that the Trigneys had picked up in Algeria, and who had now joined their party. Their souls seemed to be akin.

Together this pair would rush about heatedly, hardly visible except at meals, Cara with a flying brown veil, and a notebook, and her gallant giving a weird and floating impression of duck's-egg colour, butcher-blue, curry colour and green, that reminded one of somebody's "Distemper" catalogue. He had a long thin neck that turned a corner in the middle, and a fantastically fretful voice which was intended to imply culture.

From sight to sight, from theatre to gallery, from church to suburb, from prison to palace they flew, yet it can truly be said that they never saw anything at all. They only saw themselves seeing it. But the beholding of that vision was so satisfying that it would last them their whole lives.

"Of course, if I see no better prospects in the future for Cara, and at present that seems to be likely," said Mrs. Cates wearily, "I suppose they will have to get married in the end. Cara has four other sisters, all with opinions and spectacles, and if I don't do something for them I'm sure I don't know who will. Cer-

tainly not Providence or the Bachelors' Club! After all, Art circles, though not very remunerative, are respectable nowadays. It's not like the old days—the seventies or eighties say, when they really produced any Art. Then they weren't always quite *knowable*. But now things have altered in that way. One sees less and less of such people's pictures, but more and more of the artistic temperament, especially in ties and wall-papers. And after all a man in mustard colour who furnishes his house with pewter, and won't let you eat meat or curl your hair, would suit Cara better than a person more usual. She would really *like* her drawing-room walls to rub off on to her back, and bread-pans on the mantelpiece would be much more her style than a nice clock. Since she went in for a 'soul' she has taken up with such horrid crockery that I sometimes feel too indignant to waste any more time on her matrimonial affairs. They call it the simple life. So she can dress in blankets and marry a man in woad, so long as she doesn't improve *my* mind. Ah, what a fortunate and happy thing is a marriage like yours, dear Lady Finroy! You are indeed blessed by heaven! Every woman must envy you. But you were born lucky, you know!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

"Again a long draught of my soul-wine!—look forth  
o'er the years;

Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin  
with the seer's!"

BROWNING.

WHEN the wind blows westward across the Kentish salt-marshes you can hear the factory-whistles of Chatham and Rochester as far as the county town of Cobdenmere. They come singing over the flats, softened by the long distance and heightened acoustic-

ally by the winding intervention of the river Medway till they form simulated chords and cadences of a certain quaint beauty. There is one combination about noon which, floating so across the wide river and the miles of yellow bulrush and grass, sounds curiously like the first few bars of a dreamy *berceuse*.

Far in the distance also over those salt yellow acres, you can sometimes see the tall chimney-shafts of Rochester, and the masts and vague brown sails of the river shipping. Grey and fawn and mauve they loom, as though painted on the low sky-line by a delicate hand, as the voices of them are mellowed by the delicate magic of distance.

You can hardly expect Cobdenmere, a town composed principally of steam laundries, undertakers' businesses, coal-yards, level-crossings and chapels, to take a very deep interest in this phenomenon, even if it has ever noticed it at all. It is too practical and progressive.

It would take a strange, outlandish woman like Lady Finroy of Cobdenmere to be so absurd and childish as to be interested in such nonsense. But this person has more than once surprised the neighbours by the oddity of her tastes, and they have turned away with a slow shrug and pulled-down lip, remembering that she was an unholy dancer and what not once upon a time, and so therefore unaccountable in all her ways.

Once when some very daring members of the county, after long consideration and delay, called upon her, having something to gain from her husband in the way of town introductions, Lady Finroy stopped pouring out cups of tea for the grim circle, and holding the teapot in her arrested hand said suddenly—

“Sh-h-hh-h! The shunting hooter!” and listened with all her ears.

And another time, when some important person came down for the unveiling of a specially hideous drinking

fountain, spotty and mendacious (the fountain), in memory of somebody local, the new wife of Sir Nigel Finroy had turned away in the middle of the platform formalities and peered over towards Rochester, crying rapturously—

“Dinner whistles!” half under her breath, but with the animation of parted lips and joyful eyes. “Dinner whistles!”

So that she had got up that most blessed of reputations—a name for oddity, and was thenceforth allowed in reason to do as she liked.

Though she had lived there for two years now, the county did not, would not, receive her as a whole; but a few daring spirits, aware of her husband’s inherited political influence, at all events towards Reform Club introductions, ventured to make themselves polite from time to time. However big a failure he is, a man with a great father has a certain set of followers who still cling about him for the last few crumbs that fall from his table.

But Nigel’s weird luck had followed him even here, in so far as a settled invalidism had, in the nick of time, rescued him from the attacks of his worst enemies. Even the Radical Association—even Blagdon—could hardly get at a man said to be in mortal agony at times, certainly seen motoring about the lanes and byways with an earthy-white face, muffled up about the ears, and for once in his life quiet of tongue. This spectral figure, clinging as if for dear life to the grave child at his side, was all that the little town saw of him now.

Sometimes Lady Finroy, with her clear face lifted up out of her furs in her imperious little fashion, accompanied him, but not often. She had such long hours in the sick-room or by the fretful invalid’s couch that the drives were her “off-duty” times.

Then she would put on her hat and run down to the



ugly little brick houses of the few tenants, and talk to them about their work with a curious ease and good humour. She had a tremendous vogue with such persons as laundry workers and hop-pickers, with whom she seemed to get furtively on eternal good terms without so much as uttering half a word. It was her principal social business.

One late summer, when the hordes of hop-pickers bore down from slum-land into the Kentish lanes and hop-fields, she took little Simon down to the station to see them come in a wild and ragged regiment. They arrived in the full glare and dust of a hot August afternoon, white-faced, perspiring and exhausted, teeming from their filthy hovels for this chance of a summer holiday, faint with the stifling journey and packed train carriages.

Simon was delighted and clapped his hands.

“ ‘ Hark, hark, the dogs do bark,  
The beggars are coming to town,  
Some in rags and some in jags  
And one in a velvet gown ! ’ ”

he cried ecstatically, and pointed. “ See, Mummie, one in a velvet gown, really ! See, see ! A blue velvet gown ! ”

Lady Finroy laughed.

“ Oh, dear, poor thing, how stuffy in this weather ! ” she said.

“ Then what does she wear it for ? ”

“ That’s to carry it, instead of luggage. You see, she can’t afford luggage, and that’s her best Sunday dress, so she’s put it on over the others to travel in. They do.”

“ What a *good* idea,” said Simon, with grave interest, now gazing respectfully, almost enviously, at the young woman. But as she emerged from the steaming, shoddy crowd trooping forth from the station, his eyes

grew bigger, for it became clear that this enterprising hop-picker had not only brought all her dresses upon her back, but most of her furniture and property; for round the bunchy skirt of that cotton velveteen frock, a little below her hip-line, a stout piece of blind-cord was fastened, and from it was hung, amongst sundry other things, a frying-pan, a small mahogany mantelpiece clock, a baby's chair, a kettle, some tin mugs, an enamelled jug, and a small pair of tongs. The woman's arms were full of immense bags and bundles tied up in handkerchiefs, and her death-white face, crowned by two ragged hats one on the top of the other, was perspiring terribly. Her dragged fringe was hanging limply over her tired eyes.

"Oh!" screamed Simon. "How splendid! Oh Mummy, do let us travel so when next we go away! Oh, let me take a clock round my waist! Oh, do!" He danced up and down in the motor in his excitement.

But Lady Finroy was looking closely at the jaded face of the hop-picker.

"Beattie!" she called softly, and added, after glancing warily round to see that the county was not by to listen, "Cheer O! Piggie's Island!"

"Right you are!" mechanically answered the weary creature. But she stared about her with astonished tired eyes to see who called her.

Lady Finroy leaned from her motor with beaming eyes.

"See, Beattie," she said, "it's Nelly Lovekyn. Don't you remember? Whose fields are you going to?"

The amazed hop-picker stood open-mouthed, and would have gone on standing so for ever. She seemed too weary to grasp the meaning of it. But little Simon said—

"Oh, come to my fields, to my fields, and let me see you take off all the clocks! Oh, do, do."

"It's Hardy's," at last she replied. Hardy was one of their own tenant farmers, and his fields lay on their way home. Lady Finroy took the ecstatic Simon on to her own knee and insisted upon the much-luggaged lady riding in her motor to the farmer's. In entire weariness and astonishment the burdened creature obeyed.

On the way she told them that she had come down with her sister and brother-in-law and the children, but had missed them in the crowd at the station. Also that "she was out of work" and had been ill, and needed the nice country holiday. The things she carried were of the household of her sister.

"You see, she and Alf put me up when I was dicky," she explained. "I've got to make myself useful on the journey here to square things a little."

She gave Nelly a rapid and picturesque résumé of the careers of several work-friends since they last met, in her tired, indifferent way.

"Lucy? Oh, didn't you know about her? Yes, she was turned out like you, and she went away. Now they say she's dying."

"Where?" said Nelly.

"Oh, somewhere. She's hiding from her folks. They don't quite know. Better not ask, I should say. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Lady Finroy, and looked long and far out over the yellowing hop-fields.

Simon had a glorious time that afternoon in the hop-field, dressing himself up in several coats, with the clock and the jug and the frying-pan tied triumphantly round his waist, while the mistress of Cobdenmere saw that the Hardy kitchen yielded a generous tea to her dusty and footsore guest. She also saw that she had money to spare and a good lodging, and on her way back through the village bought and sent her a travelling-trunk, to Simon's indignation.

But when she got back she would not tell Nigel. He would have disapproved. He knew that she went and talked to the hop-pickers every year, even entertained them to tea and sang to them at evening field concerts. It was one of her curious charities, and part of her general queerness. But he would not have understood about Beattie. She had learnt to give service in silence, and to endure the long weeks and months giving and giving and taking nothing. It was what the Master Cordwayner expected of her.

But one day that autumn Nigel's medical man ordered him up to town again for another of those weary visits to specialists. Her eyes grew brilliant at the thought. London! London at any price—lovely, noisy, turbulent, busy, wicked London, instead of the endless flat desert of those weary, weary, waning fields. Oh, she would breathe again after two years' stifling imprisonment in the country! The call of the factory whistles!

They motored to town, and she and the child put up at a quiet hotel near the Nursing Home in a gloomy medical street at which Nigel himself was to stay. Simon insisted upon travelling with a carriage-clock tied round his waist, and wanted to add a toothbrush and a money-box, but was dissuaded at the last moment.

And now once again Nigel was solemnly happy. Here he was visited by a crowd of doctors and nurses, and became again the central figure in a dramatic scene truly after his own heart.

Nelly found she could slip away quite easily. Her "off" times were longer here, since the Nursing Home sternly refused to accept such feeble ministrations as a wife could give, and the boy had his nurse in attendance.

One morning she left the hotel and got into a 'bus, a nice common penny 'bus, and went down East, and had a small but rowdy ovation in Cat and Mutton Alley.



A perfect chorus of factory whistles greeted her eager ears, and she went and kissed Mr. Higgler's chief donkey, and gave the coal man a big order for coals to be presented to the ladies who came to-day to buy from him, in memory of the coal thrown at a certain Nelly Lovekyn years ago. The poor, overburdened Pharisee who threw the first greyish, slaty missile must have been quite astonished when she stopped the cart that day and produced her meagre penny, and was told that she could have a shilling's worth for nothing. Even that gallant lady could hardly carry so much in her apron, and would have the proud experience of seeing it brought to her door in a real sack!

Maggie drove Lady Finroy in the donkey dray from Stepney to Hackney Marshes, round by Victoria Park, just to see that the dear old streets were looking just as messy and good-humoured as ever. The populace, even in the Mile End Road, were quite polite, and regarded the two ladies as social equals, a coster queen in crimson velvet and feathers being the equal any day of a mere baronet's wife from the insignificant and white-shirted West.

After a really splendid time, and acquiring some special information that she wanted, Nelly gave her friends a laughing good-bye and went back Citywards. Here she alighted and walked from the main thoroughfare of Threadneedle Street down some queer side passages and hidden narrow turnings, dark and labyrinthine. She stopped at last at a small terrace of mean Georgian houses, so blocked in and crowded round by office buildings and warehouses that it was almost devoid of daylight.

At one of the houses she rang the door-bell. It was answered presently by a creature not clearly recognizable as human, yet who gave Lady Finroy no especial shock. She seemed to expect it. Out of the foul and stuffy darkness its loathsome, swollen white face and

bloodshot eyes peered in a purblind fashion, a hand fumbling at the filthy laces of a loose dressing-gown garment of some flowered woollen stuff that had once been white.

Imitation turquoises hung from its ears, though the feet in white satin slippers were stockingless; and the eyebrows were startling, being heavily pencilled in black but entirely devoid of hair. In the stuffy half-light this dull blind face under a tousled wig would have set a stout heart shuddering. Lady Finroy stood her ground sternly. She was even harshly official.

"Once again, Laura," she said coldly and haughtily, her little chin up.

There was a long pause. "What do you want here?" the creature snarled, its little daubed eyes searching her handsome, well-clad figure to and fro, up and down, perhaps in recognition.

"Lucy—that's what I want," Lady Finroy replied. "Lucy Lee. I've come for her."

The creature paused, clearly weighing the conditions.

"Lucy is here with you," Lady Finroy went on sternly. "Bring her to me, and—Oh, dear, yes, I'll make it worth your while. Don't be afraid. I can pay you."

The door opened a little wider at the promise.

"Well, you'll have to go to her, then. She's broken up. She's no good. I was going to turn her out, anyhow. I'll have my rent though."

Lady Finroy produced a generous sum and went in, up one flight of reeking, cracking stairs to a narrow bedroom on the first floor. She was led to it by the sounds of coughing proceeding from it, drowning even the voices and laughter of men and women coming from different parts of the house.

Lucy lay in a bare, wretched little room on a bed. The furniture was wretched, and clothes were tossed about upon it. A square of dirty Nottingham lace,

fastened right over the window with tin-tacks, was the only curtain. There was a miserable bit of dirty carpet, and on the mantelpiece a vase of mouldy artificial crimson roses, by way of some sort of ghastly attempt at decoration. Two indecent postcards also adorned it, and an empty purse, lying open.

Lucy lay huddled on her side on the tumbled grey sheets in a soiled nun's-veiling dressing-gown with draggled cheap lace at the throat. She gasped and panted as she lay, and on her skeleton cheek-bones some rouge, not yet rubbed off, started out from the lividness of her skin with a horrible emphasis. Her hair, always her great beauty, had still a cheap comb clinging among its rich golden meshes, now tumbled and tangled in her agony.

She started convulsively on seeing a strange lady enter, and the movement brought on another agony. Nelly stood looking down upon the wrecked heap of draggled coquetries, clenched of hand, her heart swelling into her bosom, tears forced smarting to her unwilling eyes.

When the paroxysm had abated, she spoke and told in a few brief, swift words who she was. The girl on the shoddy bed listened, but did not move.

"You'll come home with me, won't you, Lucy?"

"With you?" gasped the tangled thing out of a shuddering breath and the torn meshes of its bedraggled hair.

"Yes. Down away in the country—where there are no men," said Nelly simply.

There was a very long silence.

Then little Lady Finroy added—

"Where there is only God."

Lucy said "Yes," and fought with the anguish that followed, in sweat and tears.

Sir Nigel Finroy, in his Nursing Home, facing a far more awful verdict of his own, terrified, shaken, super-

stitious, made no demur to the plan proposed. The woman might have such and such a cottage, if my lady pleased. The woman might be supported out of his ample means, if my lady pleased. Heaven's doors seemed open only to my lady. Please her, and you had a friend at Court. So argued Nigel to himself—poor Nigel, with his cancered tongue. Yes, take the woman down to Kent if she would go. Do anything, try anything, to appease an angry Deity—if there was a Deity. To him there was only Nelly.

One has to draw a veil over that winter. One has to think of Nelly only as a spirit, a flame spirit, borne up by the mighty army of those encamping angels who come into the dwellings of the just, as she fought the death-throes of two who hung upon her hands; two who cried to her, two who lived by her, two who bore their martyrdom without screaming madness only because she brought the power of superhuman healing in her strong, devoted hands.

She did it only from her knees. The rare letters of Mr. Majorson were her only human help. Little Simon, some dim, vague recollection of his own consecrated babyhood inspiring him, and seeing everybody about him so serious, built a little queer altar in one of the disused rooms at Cobdenmere. It was made out of a dressing-table, and was draped by an ardent but ill-informed housemaid with a good full flounce of old-gold cretonne. The Ornaments Rubric was hardly familiar at Cobdenmere. Two old-fashioned brass sideboard candlesticks stood on it, and a crucifix of Simon's own, and a picture given long ago by Brother Wallbank.

But Simon called it "the Chapel" proudly, and made his mother leave her nursing by the two bedsides to come to it and play at church with him. Here he acted the Cordwayners quite happily.

So she faced her days out on that. And when the day came that the dying Magdalen blessed her and



passed quietly and peacefully out of her loving care, and was laid under the primrose-covered earth, she knew that she must find another like her to tend, or go mad with lonely thinking through the years to come.

## CHAPTER XXVII

" Her presence was soft music.

When she went

She left behind a dreamy discontent

As sad as silence when a song is spent."

ALFRED AUSTIN.

" DID you ? " said Terry Alders, longing to whistle.

" Yes, indeed. I urged her to come. I said in my letter, ' Dear Friend,' I said, ' Remembering our old happy friendship and your glorious genius now hidden and lost to society, I write to beg you to come to dear Cara's wedding.' I was sure that would bring her ! And it has. She's coming."

" Well, of course I'm delighted. Only it's such ages since she went into society, isn't it ? Not much before his death, and not at all since."

" No, over a year, of course. And now Lady Philippa lives abroad it's quite safe. Wasn't he a horrid man ? Though he was Sir Nigel, somehow I never could quite like him myself. Now she is quite different. When she was a dancer she was so popular at one's parties. And she never failed you, never, even when it was for a charity."

" She seems to be keeping up her character, too," said Terry.

" Oh, but I knew she would come for me," said little Mrs. Cates. " Can't I always manage people if I want ? Why, who else would have got the Princess—she's coming to the church—merely on a matter of lending a house for sales of work, and working at wool for chari-

ties ? And a Colonial Bishop through sending out old magazines ? Yet that's what I've done ! Don't give me away, though, there's a dear good man."

She tapped him with her fan in her Victorian manner, and went trotting and fussing to greet a bevy of new arrivals, with another flow of light chatter from her endless fountain of that social necessity.

But Terry strolled back to his seat, still trying not to whistle. Canon Slimson's church in Holiwell Square was so fashionable for weddings that the most serious people almost felt that they might talk aloud in it at any time, and with difficulty regarded it as connected with anything but rice and chiffons and orange-blossoms. And to-day was one of these occasions, fearfully intensified by the buzzing promise of a bishop and a princess. Cara Hume-Wrigley, who was about to be married to the ethically-minded man in the duck's-egg coloured collar who had gone sight-seeing with her in Paris, was perhaps the least important item in the affair. The wedding seemed to use her for a peg upon which to hang its social glories, and not to be for her own. But she was reaping the reward, at any rate, of having gone in for a misunderstood soul, and Mrs. Cates, in sheer relief at getting her off her hands, had magnanimously forgiven the canvas tops to the suitor's boots, and had insisted upon the affair taking place from her own town house in order to secure the Princess, who was known to have a weakness for weddings. And Cara was in any case too self-centred to notice that she didn't count.

And now that the guests were all flocking and rustling, scented, frivolous and noisy into the big wide nave of the church, Terry, who was one of them, began to wonder idly if his "chief" would have agreed to assist the Colonial Bishop and the Rector, Canon Slimson, with to-day's ceremony if he had known who was coming ? Mrs. Cates had pressed dear Mr. Major-

son to come and help the other clergy purposely, because she had always persisted in regarding him as a rejected lover of Cara's—in fact, Cara herself had a way of doing so too—and it was considered a piquant little addition to the sensational character of the wedding that a man who might have married the bride himself had to assist in marrying her to another man. It was felt to be quite a hint of romance. In sublime unconsciousness of this interpretation, the Vicar of St. Simon's had promised to come, innocently supposing himself to be performing an ordinary act of friendship.

How noisy and hot it was growing! The church was dark and full of red roses. Outside a heavy autumn rain was falling. Carefully placing a very indifferently brushed top-hat under a seat, Terry sat and watched the incoming tide of gaily dressed ladies and stiff-elbowed, conscious men, and wondered, chuckling a little. The situation struck him as comic, yet it was none of his affair, after all. These contretemps did happen in society at times—were bound to do so, and he liked the post of spectator always.

For he knew quite well that Majorson and Nelly had not met since Nigel's death. Majorson had been formally appointed the boy's guardian by Nigel's will, and the little Sir Simon had already been down to the Cordwayners to revisit his old friends and renew his old associations, chatty and eager and cheerful, in charge of his tutor. But my lady had, it seemed quite purposely, kept away. There had been no sign of her. Terry would not have been the man he was if he had not guessed, by the divine intuitiveness of devotion, exactly what lay between the two. That was to him an old story. But as no one had known till the last moment that Majorson would assist, why was she coming here now, of all stupid scenes and places? She, for one, certainly did not know that he was to be there.

The devout Fénelon, in one of his letters to Madame

de Maintenon after hearing that she has the toothache, counsels her to use this occasion to edify the King by showing him how patient the devotee can be under this particular torment.

Now in his long clerical tyranny over Lady Finroy Mr. Majorson's priestly letters, few but determined, had counselled above all things her duty to make herself useful to such society as would have her, to the edification of her husband. She had obeyed. From Nigel's dying bed she had done so, though the society that would have her was mainly in hop-picking circles and others even less known to the polite world. She had not been able to leave him for long enough to keep up with her friends in town for the year or two that he had lingered on. He had clung to her more and more at the last, as his one hope of salvation. He had died clinging on to my lady's hand, turning to my lady's God. And then had come his death and her year of mourning, with still Fénelon's rare but masterful letters to prick her to her duty from time to time.

At last one of the pricks had goaded. A few days ago it had happened that, receiving one of these autocratic missives down in Kent, and by the same post that urging invitation, almost appeal, from Mrs. Cates, she had gone to her writing-desk at once, saying, "Then here goes!" and had sat down and written off an acceptance to the Hume-Wrigley nuptials, of all absurd festivities! The other letter she had not answered, being, as she said, too cross with it. She kissed it and stuck it in the front of her bodice instead. It seemed to prickle with a kind of sweet pain, placed so.

And so she came to town. Now she was just a minute late for the wedding. The church was full, the Princess seated, the clergy waiting on the chancel step, the guests fluttering and whispering. The organist had just made the usual thrilling glide from the "Lohengrin" march to "The Voice that Breathed O'er Eden," and Cara,



attired as a bride, and leaning yearningly on the arm of Mr. Alec Cates, had entered at the big doors and was sailing slowly in a breathless hush up the aisle. Lady Finroy waited a few seconds till the bridesmaids, a troop of four Miss Hume-Wrigleys, all very flushed and wearing spectacles and dressed in bright eau-de-nil, had got well on along the crimson carpet. She did not want to spoil their effect of colour by what she called her widow's garments; she even thought it would be unlucky for them, though her soft smart black had about it none of the more gruesome details of mourning. She stood meekly aloof for a moment, looking curiously quiet and stately. She meant to slip into a side seat, but the church was full, and she was much too effective a guest to be allowed to sink into the background in the enthusiastic opinion of the gardenia-buttonholed young steward who ordered the seating. What a charming, irresistible woman! Who was she? The gay gallant came fussing and bowing forward and drew her along to the front, willy-nilly, and placed her in a seat two from the front, but not before her eyes and those of the Master Cordwayner suddenly met full, light to light, passion to passion, across the bent heads of the bride and bridegroom, and her swift rose-flush had answered the deepening dark of his own dark cheek. It was their first meeting since that far Easter. It had in it the eloquence of years and suffering, and the miracle of perfect union grown out of long parting. It did not need speech. It was a sort of Amen.

Afterwards Mrs. Cates said, "One could see quite clearly poor Mr. Majorson's emotion upon dear Cara's entrance! It was quite distressing for a few moments! Happily people's attention was on the Bishop and Cara's dress, and Canon Slimson took the service in his quick, easy fashion, and the incident passed unnoticed by all except those in the *know*."

One does not know what Fénelon would have said

had Madame de Maintenon taken him so seriously as to be found dancing, toothache and all, before the King. He could hardly have been more astonished, almost in a sense indignant, than Mr. Majorson when he recovered time to think upon beholding this rapid result of his own advice. An excess of obedience will sometimes give offence to the adviser. They got through Cara's marriage ceremony somehow, thanks to the business-like ways of the Bishop and the unwearying urbanity of Canon Slimson, but to one of the priests and one of the guests there were only two people in the whole of that place—two central palpitating, breathless people, who dare not raise their eyes, standing facing eternity in a surging mass of confused and unimportant humanity, which somehow called itself a wedding and actually thought it mattered.

When Cara and her philosophic bridegroom went sailing into the vestry the Princess went in solemn procession to sign the register, followed by the Lion and the Unicorn and the awed gaze of the crowd of guests, and a wild outburst of chatter the minute she had passed within the vestry door into the bobbing crowd of flowers and faces.

Inside the vestry she said a few gracious words to Cara, whom she hardly saw—nobody really saw Cara that day—had the Colonial Bishop presented to her, and ordered Canon Slimson, ever her slave, with dainty imperiousness to bring Mr. Majorson to her at once in the inner vestry. To which place she presently retired.

"My colleague will be charmed at your Royal Highness's command," bowed and curvetted the graceful Slimson, backing out on his errand.

"So!" said the Princess, dropping her eyelashes on to her cheek. She might have said "Go!" she sounded so impatient. She even seemed, for her, angry.

But her large eyes were smiling sadly when Majorson

entered the long, low room, his exquisitely handsome face with its twisted brow turned enquiringly to her, and looking quaintly merry and sad all at once. She looked at him a second with a slow, wistful regard.

"A marriage, sir!" she said. "It is ever that I find you at marriages, yet not yossel concerned! The talk has been otherwise?"

He murmured some reply, clearly confused.

"Widows that remarry I have never approved of—never!" she said gravely, but looking a soft challenge from her agate eyes. "That is known. I have never been allowed to approve of them. With us the opinion is an ordered thing. But monks that once marry I much admire. So much that—if they married the widows—it might do away with the fault. So?"

She paused. He was regarding her with embarrassed concern. She smiled tenderly.

"Monks that once marry, if they were before good men become then saints and wits, since the rubbing of any woman's brains against a man's will bring out sparks in both, and your good man makes always a better wit than your bad, while your widow makes a better saint than your demoiselle; at any rate a better philosopher, and that, in a woman, is the nearest thing to a saint. On the whole, then, if a woman remarries she should marry a monk. That is plain to me."

The priest made some indistinct assent. He stood in amazement before the Royal lady. All sorts of wild possibilities were surging through his brain, visions of the girl Queen Victoria giving a rose as a token in a conservatory, according to some old story, half forgotten. Was the Princess proposing to him? He turned hot and then cold. No, of course, she couldn't be. She could not marry a man of his rank, even if—nonsense. He was making himself silly. The sight of Nelly had unnerved him.

"It is easy enoff to see," the Princess went on dreamily, playing with her dark red roses, "that a woman to make a good wife must have first have learnt philosophy by having had to serve some man. And it is also easy to see that a monk, being an autocrat, makes the most successful husband. A husband, for all to be happy and wise, should have a strong dash of what you call a policeman in him. I think you haff that?"

He was still horribly silent except for a murmur quite incoherent, and a bow, quite jerky for him.

"If you should ever care to marry, sir," said the Princess slowly, "think over of all the women you know and decide upon the one you could bully most and take the most pleasure in bullying. Then all will indeed be happy!"

She asked him a few questions about his work, and dismissed him saying, "Remember!" She smiled a little, blushed a little, and sighed most. He was very bewildered. He saw her departure and the departure of Cara and her bridegroom to the strains of Mendelssohn, who is always doomed to be served up to the *hors d'œuvre* of Wagner on these occasions; saw the clearing out of the whole busy, talking, rustling crowd, and came away. He would leave the church and go straight back to the City. He could not go to the reception now, after seeing Nelly. It would be utterly impossible to meet her there. Mrs. Cates was going to make a big social thing of the affair, something very special indeed, he had been told. The happy pair were not going to leave till four-thirty, and though the Princess was not going to the house in Cambridge Square, the aroma of her presence would be over the whole, and had already turned the wedding into an event out of all proportion to its own merits as an interesting occasion. How heavily the scent of the red roses clung about in the rainy atmosphere!



He could not stand any more crowds and fusses to-day. Goodness knew they would be busy enough talking and feasting and chattering and gushing! He would not be missed. And Lady Finroy would be there in the midst of it, the centre of everyone's attention, surrounded again by her friends. How lovely she had grown! How stately! He hated that thought, with the illogical indignation of his kind. He had advised her to go out into society, yet he was mad at the very sight of her even at a Cates's wedding! Why? He couldn't answer. So he went down the rose-scattered church steps and out into the rain, doggedly and crossly, and tramped along without attempting to get on to one of his favourite 'bus-tops.

The rain had now become a steady downpour, and he had forgotten to bring an umbrella; but he put up his coat-collar savagely and took no further notice, ramming his hands into his overcoat pockets and tramping on and on, through many byways and brief cuts and long dreary back roads and cuttings that lay to the side of the main City streets. It took him a long time, even trudging along as briskly and indignantly as he was doing then. The mud began to gather in the running gutters and splashed up at him from the traffic wheels. He did not care. He was going back to his own City of wet and dirt and misery; he worked in it, lived for it. It was a kind of relief to plunge back into it right away from the lights and festivities of Cambridge Square, and to feel that one was cutting "the world" by this sloppy token. He must do that to think of Nelly, square up the future in his own mind.

Litany Lane at last, the grey "blind" sides of the warehouses trickling with streaks of rain in the half-light; the grey pavements running with water going with a splashing sound into the gutters. All gloriously uncomfortable, flat and wet and hopeless.

The late afternoon had almost drawn to dusk, except for a low last silver gleam coming over from where the West lay invisible behind high, towering buildings. They had put a light up in his own study, which shone out on to the wet windows of the houses opposite, otherwise the place looked lonely and dreary enough. As he passed by the church railings, ramming down his hat to prevent their drippings, rich with rusty iron, pouring on to his ears as it was doing on to the shoulder of his best overcoat, he turned his head mechanically to look for a familiar landmark, namely, the faint glow from the seven sanctuary lamps that was always visible at gloaming through the Good Shepherd window in the transept, and then stood still at the sight of something else that gleamed in the rainy dusk.

It was a face, like a softly cut point of ivory, raised, and turned also towards the faint reddish light from the Good Shepherd window. A shimmering beam of light glittered in the falling rain from the stained panes and caught the upturning of that lily-cup face in a vague, moist halo of its own.

For a second only he paused, thinking he saw a vision. Then some frightfully common details broke on to his consciousness—an umbrella behind the haloed face, a black shining garment that was clearly—romance faints!—a mackintosh, and a long black dress clutched up tightly by one hand from two thoroughly soaked, fancifully shod feet standing on a tombstone.

But he had left her at the wedding feast? What was she doing here? What was that sound? She was humming, humming out here in the rain some of their old wailing Gregorian music, minor things with a sound of eternity in them, standing alone in that wet-flagged courtyard on a wet evening by herself.

She had come for him! She had left that crowd,

"homing" back to the old home at his unspoken longing! She had always been his in spirit. Now she had come back at his prayer's long call.

Suddenly he thought of the Princess's words, "The woman you can bully most and take the most pleasure in bullying." Of course, that was what she meant!

He wasted no more time, but went straight in and up to her in his decided authoritative way. She heard his steps splashing on the wet flagstones, those graves of Queen Anne worthies long dead and forgotten, and turned with transformed face and parted lips, exclaiming—

"Master Cordwayner!"

Her heart was in her face and voice.

He went right up and took her umbrella out of her hand, shut it, put it under his arm, took the free hand and bent over to kiss it, saying—

"Mistress Cordwayner!"

"Oh!—what?" said Nelly.

"Oh, that," he replied—"that and nothing less." He had raised his head from the hand, and was looking down into her eyes while he quite calmly put both wet, overcoated arms round the bundle of her in her mackintosh and held her strongly.

"If you suppose I shall ask you to marry me," he said, looking down into her eyes, "you're mistaken. I shan't. You're just going to, because you were always meant to ever since I made you my little child. Weren't you?"

"Yes, Master," she said, and hid herself in the wet frieze and the warm kisses.

"Say Maurice," he said.

"Very well, Maurice."

"I thought you stayed at the Cates wedding?"

"I thought you did—that's why I came away."

"To avoid me?"

"Yes, because I love you so."

"That was my reason too."

Whether the Queen Anne worthies whose tombs they stood on knew and counted the time that they loved and murmured in the rain is not known. Surely they would have been cheered if they had, for in whatever sphere those old-world spirits progressed it could not be too high for love, since love, with sacrifice, is immortal.

Later on, Brother Stephen Wallbank, bearded and spectacled, stood blinking on the vicarage steps as Lady Finroy was being put into her motor and seen home by Mr. Majorson. He answered her shy good-night briskly and cheerfully, enthusiasm in his fiery artist face. Inside the porch he met Jalfin.

"Let me break it to you gently, Brother Barney," he said, wringing his hand. "We've got—or in a short time are going to have—a lady of Litany Lane."

"A—h—h—h!" said Jalfin, from under his eyebrows. "Well, on the whole it's a good thing!"

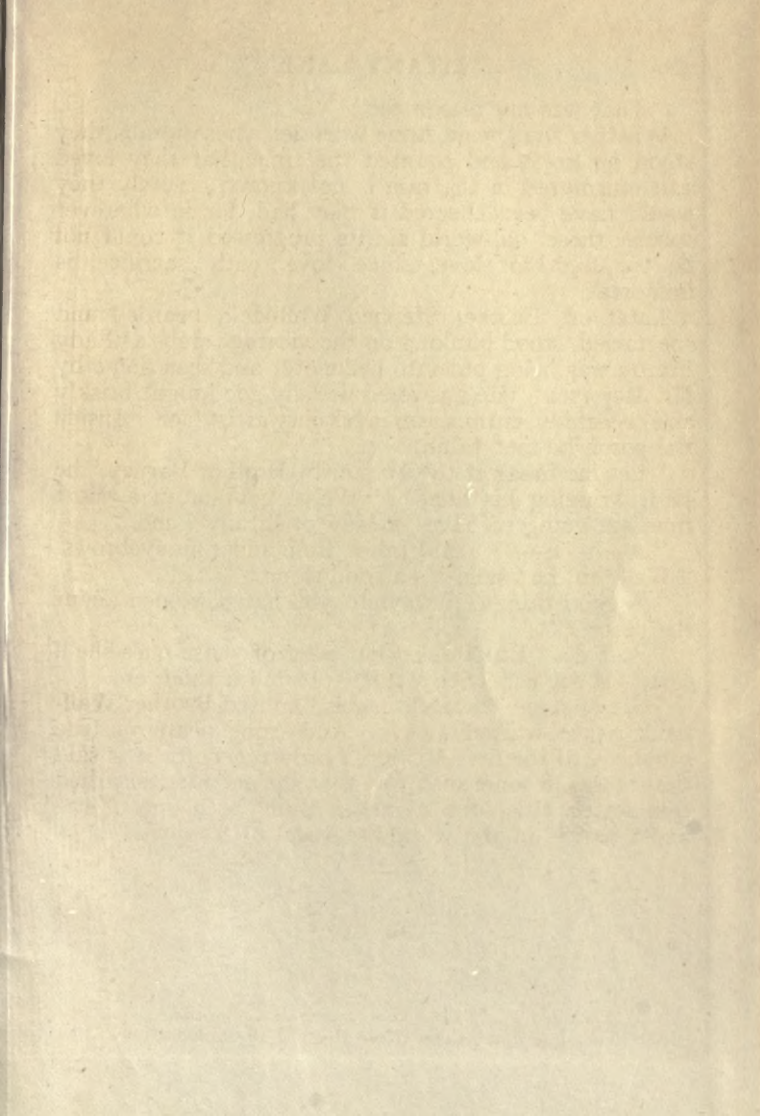
"A good thing! I thought you hated women about the place?"

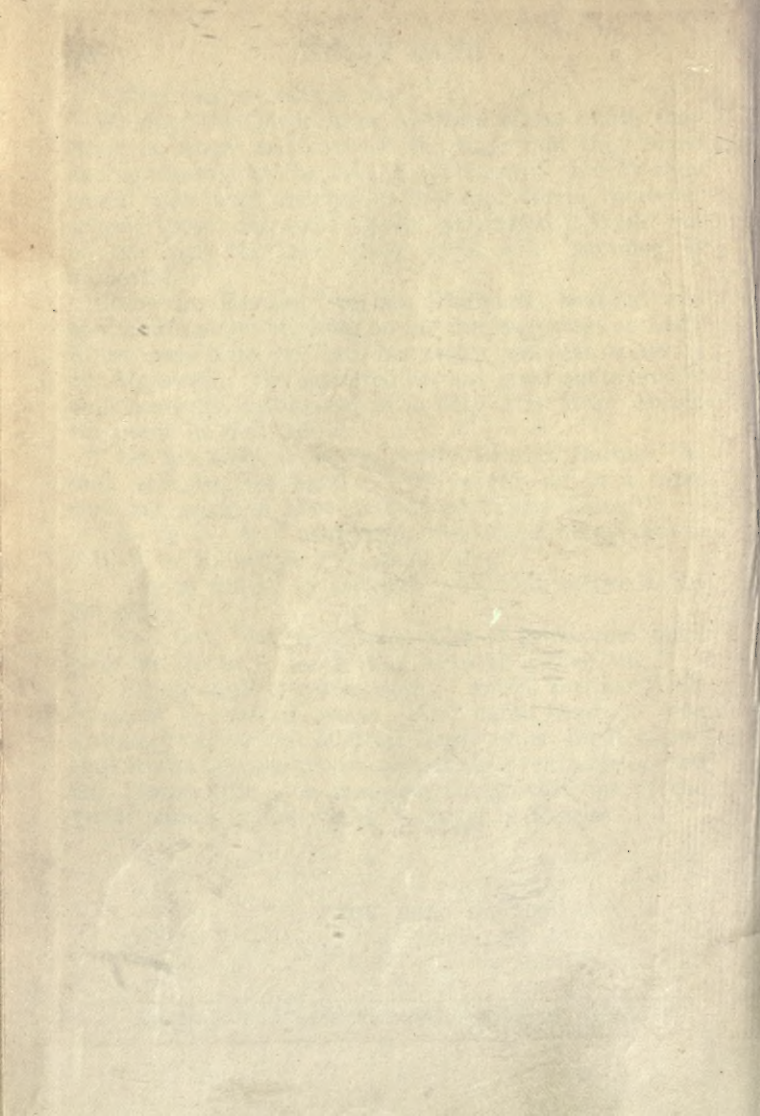
"So I do. But think what a lot of worse ones she'll clear out for us! Set a thief to catch a thief, etc."

"Set an angel to catch angels," mused Brother Wallbank as he walked away. And came nearer a true prophecy of the first Mistress Cordwayner, for it is said that it was in some such way that she eventually earned this stately title—"a nameless thing, with one of the finest names in the world"—Angel of Rescue.

THE END







PR            Baillie-Saunders, Margaret  
6003        Elsie (Crowther)  
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